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RITUAL TRADITION AND PERFORMANCE:  
THE BERA<sup>V</sup>Ā CASTE OF SOUTHERN SRI LANKA

by

Robert Simpson

A Thesis Presented for  
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the  
University of Durham

1984

Department of Anthropology  
University of Durham

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-1. MAY 1985





Plate I. The Māru Sanniya, the Demon of Death, makes his entrance.



**CONTAINS  
PULLOUT**

**BEST COPY**

**AVAILABLE**

Poor text in the original  
thesis.

Some text bound close to  
the spine.

Some images distorted

DEDICATION

To my father, Arthur Simpson.  
(1924-1983)

## ABSTRACT

The present work is based on fieldwork carried out in Southern Sri Lanka among the Beravāyō, a low status caste traditionally responsible for the performance of various ritual drumming duties. Although this occupational association goes back centuries and is still an important element in their contemporary caste identity, the Beravāyō are nowadays involved in a wide range of other ritual activities which include temple art work, astrology and in particular the performance of elaborate healing rituals for the relief of sickness and misfortune.

The thesis centers on the lives and work of those Beravāyō who are most closely involved with the performance of such healing rituals. The first part of the thesis (Chapters 1-4) deals with the social organisation of the Beravā caste, paying particular attention to the way in which the various traditions of knowledge and skill which make their ritual performances possible are reproduced. The traditions passed on within the caste are viewed as a kind of property and the role they play in strategies of marriage and apprenticeship is examined. Chapter 4 deals with the translation of personal traditions into the caste specific services for which the caste is known. This entails examining the structure and organisation of the troupes which come together to perform certain rituals and the various factors, such as cost, scale of performance and elaborateness of preparations which the ritual patron must consider.

The second part of the thesis (Chapters 5-7) deals with a specific ritual, an astrological ritual called the Bali Tovil which is intended to combat the malign influences of the planets. A description of the beliefs and ideas which underlie the ritual is given, followed by an account of a particular performance of a Bali Tovil. The analysis given in Chapter 7 attempts to account for the persuasive power which the performance of this type of ritual has in producing a positive effect on its participants.

The final Chapter (8) looks at the impact of changes upon the tradition oriented system of ritual organisation and performance described in the previous chapters. The changes in question are coming from tourism and the new markets for cultural artefacts which this brings. With changes in the style of production to meet this demand, the meaning which various traditions have for those who possess them is re-evaluated. Chapter 8 demonstrates how traditions are creatively transformed to meet these changing circumstances and the consequences this has for the wider Beravā community.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The production of a thesis creates many debts, often of a kind which are not easily discharged.

I would like to express my thanks to the S.S.R.C. (as it was then), who funded my postgraduate research.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to the following individuals who have all in various ways made important contributions to the present work: to Professor D.D. De Saram who provided me with an excellent grounding in colloquial Sinhala; to Professor Bruce Kapferer who first suggested I work with the Beravā and who gave generously of advice and information; to Mr. Will Johnson, Dr. Mark Hodge and Dr. Andy Kendrick who were my contemporaries in the field; to Mr. B.N. Wijeratne who was not only my research assistant but also became a valued friend and companion; to Mr. C. Vitarana who gave invaluable assistance towards the end of my fieldwork in the collection and collation of genealogical material; to the members of the Durham postgraduate community - Dr. Peter Fillimore, Mr. Tom Holman, Dr. Alison James, Dr. Marie Johnson, Dr. Brendan Quayle, Mr. Ian Whitelaw and Mr. Malcolm Young, in discussion with whom I have learned much; to Mr. Barrie Ormsby, a friend and mentor; to Dr. Michael Carrithers whose timely arrival in Durham gave a significant input to the quality of the present work; to Mr. David Brooks, my supervisor, who for several years has been a source of highly original ideas and who, particularly in the long, hot summer of '84', spent many hours reading and discussing drafts of the present work; to Mike Smith who did the plates; to Mrs. Pauline Russell who did the diagrams; to Jill Foley who has typed this cumbersome tome; to my wife, Joanna, who has given unfailing love and support throughout what must be one of the worst forms of spectator activity imaginable, namely bringing a piece of research to fruition in the form of a thesis; but finally my deepest gratitude goes to all my Beravā friends, named and unnamed, who gave me generous access to their lives and work, and shared, albeit briefly, something of their sorrow and their joy.

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## PREFACE

The feeling of gratitude and humility that every member of a given culture can and must feel toward all others can only be based on one conviction: it is that other cultures are different from his own in the most varied way; this remains the case even if the final nature of these differences escapes him or if despite all, one only succeeds in penetrating it imperfectly.

Claude Levi-Strauss

The present work concerns itself with the lives and work of a group of ritual specialists operating within a complex, literate and highly stratified society and within a major religious system. The society is that of contemporary Sri Lanka, and in particular the South of that island with its distinct and vibrant cultural identity. The religious system in question is that of Buddhism which, with its deep rooted history and various interlaced strands of thought and belief, provides a richly textured backdrop for my account. The people who provide the focus for my study are members of the Beravā caste.[1] Nominally they are drummers but relatively few are engaged in this hereditary caste occupation. Nowadays



the Beravā engage in a wide range of ritual and non-ritual activities; they are exorcists, astrologers, temple artists and diviners, as well as masons, carpenters, labourers and the like.

Their traditional, ritual, caste associated occupations locate them in what has been variously characterised as the magical, animist or apotropaic domain of belief and action. They have the wherewithal to identify and combat the malign effects of demons and spirits, of man and deity. Their services are called upon when the problems of this world bring suffering to mortal bodies and abstract doctrines can offer but little in the way of consolation or relief. The services which the Beravā offer their clients answer a deeply felt human need to act and seek order in the face of adversity; to render meaningful, events and occurrences which bring social, physical and psychological disorder into the lives of men and women.

My study is thus located in the realm of the Little Tradition or what Leach (1968:1) has characterised as the domain of 'Practical Religion'. It concerns first and foremost what people actually do rather than what, doctrinally as Buddhists, they are supposed to do, and addresses itself to the experience of Berava ritual specialists here and now. The present work, however, goes rather further in its attempts to convey a picture of 'Practical Religion' as it is lived by Buddhists in Sri

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Lanka today. It does so mainly in its attempts to articulate something of the processes and possibilities which dominate the lives of those most centrally involved with the production and re-production of the particular beliefs and values which characterise this domain. In general terms I illustrate how one category of people, the Beravā, succeed in holding up a particular section of the overall religious pantheon, adapting their specialist activities both to the changing canopy of wider beliefs as well as to the transforming expectations of their public. To accomplish this it was necessary to pay careful attention to the social mechanisms which enable the Beravā to pass on their specialist knowledge and skills within the caste and orchestrate these skills as a service to the wider society. It was further possible to examine the way in which the ritual artists and craftsman, performing within and acting with a stock repertoire of symbols and metaphors, express themselves and make their actions meaningful to an audience.

The process of rendering specific actions and utterances as meaningful, I take to be fundamentally linked to the nature of ritual performance: its conception, structure, organisation and the manner in which the actors translate their knowledge and beliefs into action at any particular time. It is through the performance of carefully orchestrated actions, the manipulation of symbols and the enactment of metaphors



within a wider context, which the ritual patron/patient plays a crucial role in defining, that intimations of a transcendental order are communicated and experienced. Within each ritual a cosmology is fashioned at the local level and the participants located therein.

Throughout my work I have tried to maintain an awareness of the aesthetic dimension of the many activities of the Beravā, not as something distinct from 'Practical Religion' but as an essential component of it. The blending of aesthetics and the politics of practice provides an entree into the distinctive idiom in which the Beravā express their perceptions of demons and spirits, and an understanding of suffering in their lives and daily work. It has been my aim to convey, as much as possible within the canons of accepted anthropological discourse, the consequences which this mode of life and this idiom has upon those most closely bound to it.

The data upon which this thesis is based was collected in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka during the period from October 1978 to April 1980. The early months of my stay were spent at Pēradeniya where, under the careful supervision of Professor D.D. De Saram, I learned Sinhala. During this period I made several exploratory trips to the South where it was my intention to conduct research into groups engaged in the production of traditional arts and crafts and their role in contemporary society.

It was through a chance encounter with Professor Bruce Kapferer of Adelaide University that my attention was directed towards the Beravā caste about whom I knew little at that time. Professor Kapferer had already worked extensively with the Beravā caste in the area around Galle and gave generously of both advice and information which eventually led me to commence my research in the area around the small market town of Akuressa, some 23 miles north east of Galle.

With an introduction arranged by Professor Kapferer I was warmly received into a family living in a small Beravā community near Akuressa. The head of the family, a drummer named Cyril [2], was a leading figure in his own community and with his assistance my first steps were taken in getting to know his kinsmen, and perhaps more important, becoming known by them.

At that time I, along with my research assistant, took temporary lodgings in the house of a retired, high-caste policeman (Goyigama). My early days in the area were largely spent travelling about the countryside, often with Cyril, in search of his relations. This I recall was an intensely frustrating exercise; the community was seemingly shapeless and scattered over a wide geographical area. Relatively, the area was in fact quite small, possibly little more than a hundred square miles of the Nilvala valley. However, the unreliability of public transport, the inaccessibility of many



dwellings, the elusiveness of many key male informants and their nocturnal work patterns rendered days and sometimes weeks wasted in fruitless journeys. Often as not an uncomfortable three hour trek in search of some important individual would be rewarded by the knowledge that the man I sought had gone away and would not return until the following day. My bemused hosts would offer hospitality of the best they could muster which I would consume alone, listening to animated whispers from behind thin walls. After an exchange of pleasantries, beyond which there rarely seemed much possibility of proceeding, I would start my return journey, disenchanted to say the least.

The feeling of frustration and impotence which I felt on those early visits was only slightly ameliorated when I was accompanied by my mentor, Cyril. This was largely because from the beginning I became an important source of kudos for Cyril in his political machinations within his own community. Consequently in my interactions with his kinsmen, I became the subject of a very explicit and often exaggerated control by him. This issue remained a source of conflict right up until the very final day of my fieldwork: a salutary lesson that the field anthropologist is never a free agent but, as an inevitable result of the sequence and type of relationships made in the initial stages of fieldwork, is the subject of a determinism which carries him or her, whether they realise it or not, along the internal cleavages of a small-scale community. Thus,

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certain kinsmen and even whole villages were proscribed by Cyril, whilst other interactions were encouraged. The picture of the community I eventually arrived at was seen through an aperture of which I thought I was in control but which, in fact, Cyril himself controlled and directed.

On the occasions I was accompanied by my research assistant, Wije, visits to houses went more smoothly, although at the time I considered this as something of an admission of defeat.

Such were my early efforts to map the Beravā community in the area. Information came slowly: a scrap of genealogical material here, a fragment of information about magical practices there and occasional attendance at all night ceremonies up and down the area.

Despite making numerous significant and long standing relationships in the beginning, none of my Beravā friends ever accepted an invitation to visit me at the house where I was lodging. On one occasion a friend came as far as the verandah where he paced uneasily in front of it with one eye cautiously on the interior of the house. In mid-sentence he left, seemingly unable to stand his ground any longer. It was suddenly all too apparent that it was unlikely that any Beravā would ever be comfortable in a situation where the status discrepancy was so great.

My next residence was the house of an ex-government clerk who had fallen from grace as a result of shifting political patronage. He claimed to be little bothered

about caste, or anything else for that matter. With the exception of money, both these claims proved to be true: my low-caste friends felt no qualms about calling in the part of the house in which we lived.

Although it had been my intention to move into one of the Berava communities with which I had come into contact, this did not happen and I remained, somewhat unsatisfactorily, in the above residence for the remainder of my fieldwork. That I did not get to live within a Berava community for an extended period remains one of the great disappointments of my fieldwork, and although I was always in close contact with several communities and frequently stayed for three or four nights, I always felt I was a visitor of a rather superficial kind. The reasons for my failure to make the all important jump from outside to inside are perhaps easy to identify with hindsight but were not so clear cut at the time. Initially, there was the important moral question of whether it was right for me to take up space and resources of what were already in many instances poor and pressured communities, where living space was at an absolute premium. My answer was that I would do so if a suitable situation arose. A number of suitable situations did arise in the village of Beragoda, but each time, either accidentally or as a result of preventative action on the part of members of the community, my move was confounded. The reason for this preventative action, I feel, was due to the fact that



basically I was always welcome as a visitor to the community but, in such a secretive and turbulent community, it would have been far too threatening to have me there all the time. What to me were innocent questions about what I took to be their 'general knowledge' were in fact indiscriminate interruptions causing potential imbalances in a finely calibrated system. The knowledge I was seeking to acquire, far from being abstract and academic, was in fact highly sensitive and subject to complex strategies of transmission. In practical terms the commodity in which I was interested was crucial politically to the internal working of the community and consequently its revelation or concealment from me was not just accidental. Indeed, the nature of the information I collected was such that it had to be acquired according to strategies which my informants themselves determined. An important aspect of this strategy was that they regulated how close (socially and physically) I was able to get to their community.

A further reason for my being kept at a safe distance was that it was far more prestigious in terms of status for their communities to have me as a regular visitor rather than as a resident, in which case I would simply have become an embarrassing oddity.

Although I have expressed the fact of my residence outside of any particular Berava<sup>1</sup> community in negative terms, clearly there were a number of distinct advantages.

Once again, these relate primarily to the nature of the knowledge and information I was seeking to acquire. To have thrown in my lot, as I had already done to a degree with Cyril and his kinsmen, with one particular community would have immediately made relations with other communities and particular specialists difficult if not impossible. As it was, I was able to maintain a degree of autonomy in my movements and interactions which enabled me to gather alternative views and perceptions from within the wider Beravā community. For example, to become identified too closely with one particular exorcist would have immediately alienated all other exorcists, who, invariably in contention, are always mindful of betrayals which might disadvantage them. Thus, it was often the case that I would not make my movements too public and in cases where I was visiting or being visited by kinsmen less acceptable to my main body of informants, interviews would be conducted somewhat discreetly.

Similarly, with respect to my attendance at rituals performed by the Beravā, to be located in one particular community would not have served any great purpose. Exorcisms were taking place continually over a wide area and being performed by troupes from different areas as well as different configurations of kinsmen from the same areas. Living outside of any particular community enabled me to maintain relations with several groups of performers simultaneously although this inevitably had its own

problems.

My work proceeded on two levels. On the one hand I was collecting data concerning kinship, marriage and the way in which different skills and knowledge had been passed on between key figures in the Beravā community. The main focus for this aspect of my study was the village of Beragoda described in Chapter 2. On the other hand, my work involved attendance at major healing rituals performed by the Beravā, of which I witnessed thirty-six of varying type, as well as a number of smaller ones. In attending these rituals I would often travel with the troupes involved as they fulfilled their various commitments. Attendance at such events was often problematical, not least because it was necessary to stay awake for as long as twenty-four hours at a stretch. More problematical, however, were the dynamics set up at each performance: I would arrive with the performers, yet would be expected to become part of the audience. This separation was often reinforced by both patron and performers alike and highlighted the nature of the interaction between ritual specialists and their public. Similarly, even my close Beravā friends would 'forget' to invite me to ceremonies which were either small, that is, unrepresentative of the true extent and complexity of their skill (an attitude understandable in anybody who takes pride in their work) or else if the venue was one where there was likely to be tension and trouble, which in



many instances there was. The trouble was usually between members of the audience, exorcism in particular providing something of an arena in which all manner of social ills can be aired, but it is not uncommon for confrontations to develop between patrons and performers. It was this that my friends were anxious to keep me away from, as much for my safety as for their own good name.

The information collected for this thesis fell broadly into two closely related areas, namely, tradition, its identification with the Beravā caste and the social mechanisms of its reproduction; and secondly, performance, the creation of complex healing rituals from the various repertoires of knowledge and skill which are received as traditions. The collection of detailed information on these topics was given direction by the accumulation of statement and counter-statement and a consistent attempt to locate myself as a participant-observer within the various discourses that took place. Data concerning ritual performance was further based on my involvement in a variety of ritual performances, careful observation of the proceedings, tape recordings of songs, incantations and drumming, photographic evidence and discussions with the participants of particular rituals. As such the present work is concerned with style, that is, with the expressive qualities of ethnography rather than numerical quantities, and it is to the question of ethnography that I now turn.

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The general emphasis throughout the present work is predominantly ethnographic with the emphasis falling upon the organisation and presentation of an original body of facts and details concerning the Berava and their rituals. My presentation, however, is far from a simple ethnographic account (if indeed such a thing exists). On the contrary, it has been my intention to incorporate theoretical insight at the very level of ethnographic interpretation and presentation, not as a gloss which is applied onto a straightforward, objective narrative of ethnographic details. In attempting a theoretical structuring of the text it has been my intention to give greater resonances to the ethnography presented; the form of the thesis plays a crucial role in expressing its content, while the content demonstrates its form. Significantly, this is one of the essential points made in Chapter 7 concerning the inscription or fixing of meaning in ritual.

In many other respects the structure of the thesis further resembles the processes of healing and exorcism which I have described. For example, all healing rituals initiate a process of framing whereby the individual and his or her affliction are progressively located within the cosmos. Obeisance is paid to all the superior and higher beings in the cosmos before moving to the more specific and subordinate realms. Likewise, Chapters 1-7 of the



present work effect a similar framing process in a move from higher order categories to lower order ones and down to the level of specific individuals. Each Chapter further locates the subject matter within wider frameworks, so that by Chapter 7 a number of very specific issues relating to the nature of ritual performance can be dealt with.

Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to the Sinhalese caste system and the place of the Beravā within it. Attention is paid particularly to the treatment received by the Beravā as a category and the negative discrimination which accompanies their category identity. In this Chapter the hypothesis is put forward that for the Beravā the link between caste identity and occupation is still strong. It is further suggested that the clue to the nature of this link might be found in the ideas surrounding misfortune and malevolence and their source in flaws and imperfections (dos). Dos as a theme can be found running through all the various activities carried out by the Beravā; it adheres to objects and individuals and is inherent in certain actions. As becomes clear in Chapter 7, dos is an inevitable consequence of the passage of time and it is the negative consequences which this fact brings that the Beravā have to deal with in various forms. Their role is to remove it, absorb it, deflect it and anticipate it on behalf of their clients.

Chapter 2 shifts from category to community and

provides a general account of the village in which I carried out the bulk of my fieldwork. Descriptions are given of the people who live there and the various works in which they engage.

The third chapter focusses more specifically on a critical binding mechanism within the community, namely, traditions. Examples of the transmission of traditions in various ritual and non-ritual professions are used to demonstrate the hypothesis that in the absence of land as a community resource, traditions fulfill an ideological role similar to other kinds of property. Like more conventional types of property, traditions are subject to strategic decisions over their transmission and disposal. In the transmission of traditions, processes of dispersal and concentration of this 'scarce' resource are illustrated as well as the strategies of marriage and apprenticeship which lead to the maintenance of elites in the field of ritual performance.

In Chapter 4, the process whereby individual traditions are translated into actual performances is dealt with. Accounts of the procedures involved in organising a major ritual, both from the perspective of the patron as well as from that of the Beravā individual or troupe supplying the service are given. A key theme in this chapter is the relationship between the magnitude and complexity of the performance on the one hand and the expenditure and social status of the patron on the other.

The two are seen as indexically linked, uniting interests and intentions which are simultaneously cosmological, strictly temporal and specifically local, within the coherent format of a single ritual event.

The first four chapters provide an introduction to the social organisation of the Beravā and in particular, as their organisation relates to the production of a range of rituals as services to the wider society. In the following three chapters I turn to a detailed explication of a single ritual complex, namely the Bali Tovil, an astrological ritual intended to relieve the misfortunes arising from the negative influences of certain planets and deities. Chapter 5 gives an introduction to the Bali Tovil, its origins and location within the wider Sinhalese ritual division of labour. The latter part of the chapter attempts to explain the mechanisms and beliefs which underlie the Bali Tovil and in particular its relationship with astrology which serves as a device for ascertaining the source of personal misfortune.

Chapter 6 provides a narrative account of the performance of a particular Bali Tovil in an attempt to demonstrate how beliefs and abstract structures are realised as unique events capable of communicating meanings which are highly specific to a particular time, a particular place and the particular participants.

This theme is further developed in Chapter 7 in which I undertake an analysis of the Bali Tovil. My



analysis examines the nature of performance and the ways in which it successfully persuades those participating of the efficacy of such action. Central to this analysis is the form which the ritual takes, its structure, organisation in space and time and the media employed to mark off the event within the flow of mundane reality. The analysis demonstrates how the Beravā, in the embodiment and enactment of their traditions in performance, are able to realise and articulate specific meanings to their audience. These meanings are not fixed or prescribed but are felt with greater or lesser intensity according to the degree to which each performance is constructed to meet the precise needs of any particular set of participants. It is only by examining ritual performance in its totality that we can begin to account for the potency of this type of action in the face of personal misfortune.

In the final chapter my attention turns to an area which is encompassed by the traditional domain of ritual production discussed in the previous chapters yet is strikingly distinct from it. As a result of the growth of tourism and the markets this brings there is currently considerable demand for 'cultural' souvenirs and entertainment. In response, a number of Beravā families have turned their energies and skills to producing items for this most lucrative market, often at the expense of traditional networks of distribution and the kin ties

which reinforce them (the examples of masks and dances for tourists are dealt with). Chapter 8 investigates some of the effects of this change in style and meaning of production and the consequences this is having on the lives of a number of individuals who have taken this step.

In keeping with the ritual paradigm which runs throughout the structure of my thesis, this final chapter echoes the final stages of the rituals I describe. In performance, the Beravā elaborate a ritual reality over many hours, as I have done over many pages; the persuasive power of this reality is felt most powerfully when, at the end of each ritual, it is unravelled in a joltingly short space of time. Chapter 8, as something of an antithesis to the preceding chapters, is my own attempt to reinforce the reality I have described by demonstrating the means of its dissolution. Chapter 8 demonstrates how the sense of time and tradition elaborated over many generations among the Beravā is potentially erased once their style of production changes. As members of the Beravā community begin to exploit the outlets which the tourist market creates for specific goods, a re-evaluation of the meaning that traditions have for certain families inevitably takes place. Chapter 8 focusses on the nature of this re-evaluation.

At one end of the spectrum of Beravā styles of production I have described the Bali Tovil, a ritual creation highly specific to person, place and time which

brings together many aspects of local thought and belief. The production of this ritual involves the co-operation of several Beravā<sup>̄</sup> kinsmen who each contribute the benefits of their particular traditions in return for the ambiguous benefits of their traditional service relationship. At the other extreme, all but emptied of time and tradition, I have described the production of devil dance masks for the tourist market, row upon gaudy row of identical artefacts awaiting cash sale.

Both forms of production are crucial to the kaleidoscope of Beravā<sup>̄</sup> activities which give them both their livelihood and their identity. The interplay of the Traditional and the creative demonstrates the dialectic by which Tradition continues as a powerful contemporary force: Tradition is the history of creativity.

#### NOTES TO PREFACE

[1] Throughout the thesis the term Beravā<sup>̄</sup> is used to describe the caste, as this is the term commonly used by outsiders. Strictly speaking they should be called the Beravā<sup>̄</sup> Kuliya or else by the plural form, Beravāyō<sup>̄</sup>.

[2] In view of the fact that many of the people described in this work are still living and performing in the Southern Province, many of their names have been changed. Wherever possible the substitute names either resemble the originals in sound or else are similar in style, thus retaining something of the feel for their caste specificity.



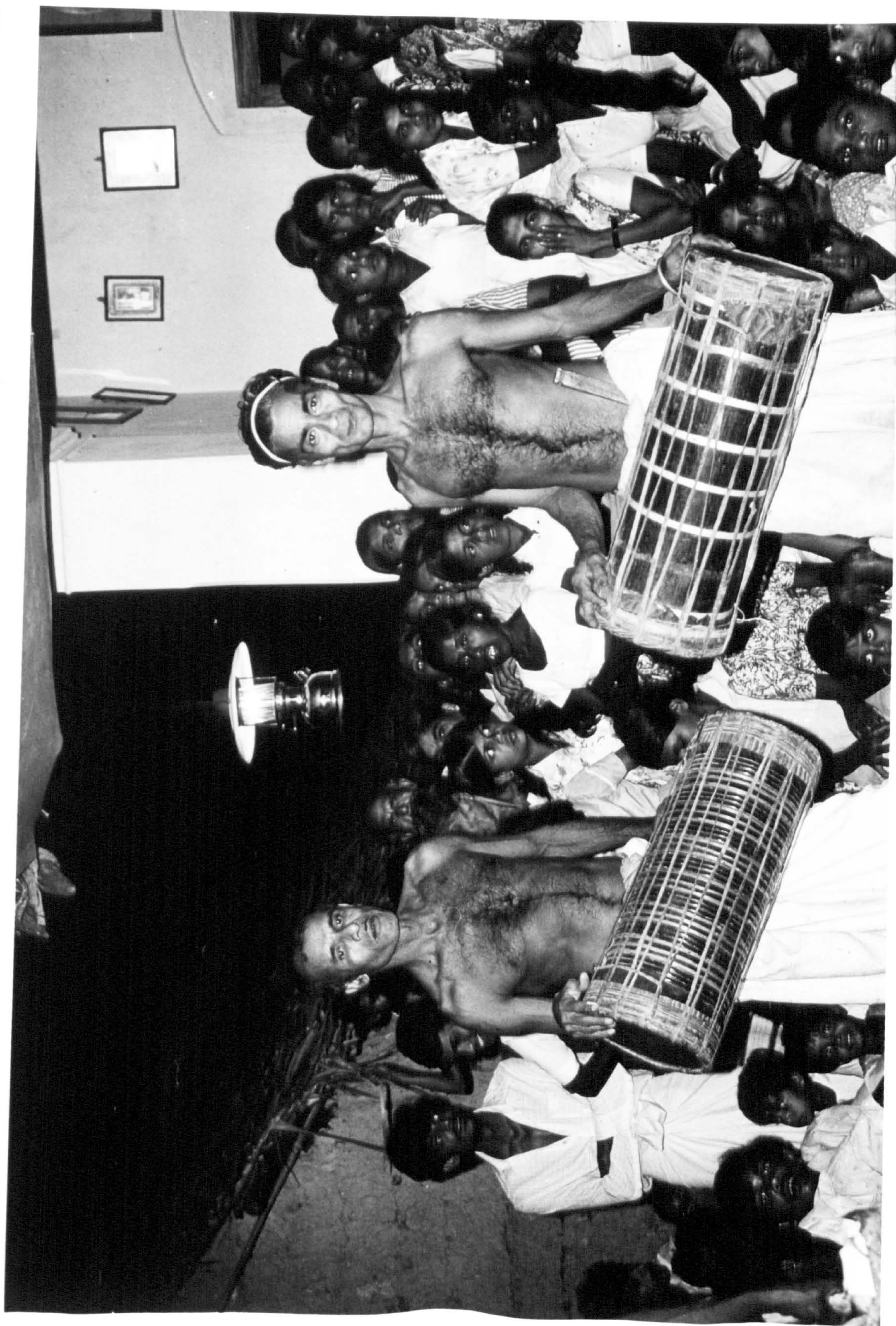


Plate II. Drummers at the beginning of a nightlong ceremony.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: THE BERAVĀ, STATUS AND OCCUPATION

'They were the demon priests, their drumming and dancing being connected with the rituals pertaining to death, disease and decay.'  
(Pieris 1956:174)

#### 1.1 Caste

On an early visit to the village in which most of my fieldwork was carried out, a man stopped me as I was about to leave the tarmac road to traverse the muddy bunds which zig-zagged across the paddy fields. With marked sincerity he offered his advice: "Don't go over there mahattayā, it's all Beravā". ("Ē pātte yanna epā mahattayā tanikara Beravā.") The man was a farmer of the Goyigama caste, the people I was to visit were drummers. He was 'good' (hoṇḍa) and they were 'bad' (naraka). He was 'high' (usa) and they were 'low' (adu). Reiterated throughout my fieldwork, these three essentials of caste: occupational association, status discrimination with moral overtones, and hierarchy, served to differentiate and maintain distance between the Beravā and the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists in the midst of whom they live.

The institutional perpetuation of difference and opposition between the elements which comprise the caste



system is one of the more fundamental structural features of the caste system and South Asian social organisation in general. The elements which form the system are separate and endogamous. They are ranked in terms of ascribed status and are attributed with varying degrees of purity and impurity.

An important source of identity of the castes and of discrimination between them is hereditary occupational specialisation, either actual or by association. Castes are named after the specialist activities they carry out or once carried out and they are identified through the symbols and products of their professions. The shift from the castes, the parts of the system, to a system of parts is effected through an exchange of the goods and services associated with the castes. Caste operates as a society-wide system of economic and symbolic inter-dependence, a very particular expression of the division of labour.

In the course of this Chapter, it is my aim to describe the position of the Beravā in Sinhalese society, not so much as an empirically observable social group, but rather as a conceptual category surfacing in certain aspects of Sinhalese thought. This will involve us in looking at the way in which the differences outlined above are expressed and maintained at a local level. Particular attention will be given to the question of occupation both from a historical and present-day perspective, examining

the relation of what the Beravā are supposed to do with what they actually do.

Hocart's view of caste as the society-wide celebration of kinship and cosmology is still, in essence, useful in understanding the role of groups like the Beravā in society:

'If one section may not concern itself with the inauspicious ritual of death for fear of contaminating the auspicious ritual of life, then some other section must handle death and decay, for these are inexorable facts which must be dealt with. An hereditary group is therefore necessary to deal with them.'

(Hocart 1950:20)

The Beravā still fulfill a critical role as the ones who deal with the 'inexorable facts' of life, taking upon themselves the consequences of disorder and pollution, symbolically restoring and maintaining order through their actions whenever the negative forces at work in the cosmos threaten to disrupt the world of men. In rites associated with illness and misfortune, death and disease, and in acts of creation and ordering generally, the Beravā are to be found. Like the healers, shamans, diviners and creative artists of so many societies, the Beravā find themselves on the margins of society and imbued with the power of the margins. Their power is essential but its benefits must be balanced against the disruptive threat it poses to the dominant structures of society. Just as they are able to transform negative to positive, sickness to health, disorder to order etc., they are also in command of the

reverse process and are feared as a result. Prejudice and discrimination, rules and restrictions, all serve to hedge and bound the Berava and the powers they embody thus placing them outside the normal structural arrangements of the society.

### 1.2 The Sinhalese Caste System

Although historically and conceptually related to the Indian caste system, the Sinhalese system has a number of features which distinguish it from its Hindu counterpart. On the one hand, ascriptive status, occupational association, attribution of varying degrees of purity and impurity and a more or less elaborate system of intercaste etiquette do enable us to speak of the Sinhalese system as a variant of the caste system. However, its development against a back-drop of Buddhist religion and polity have given it its own special characteristics. Absent from the Sinhalese system is the rigidity with which the Indian system is infused. Social distances between castes are not so great and the purity and pollution which adheres to groups at opposite ends of the caste hierarchy is greatly ameliorated.

The tendency towards a more fluid system of interaction and less rigid hierarchisation is reinforced by Buddhism which neither condones nor denounces caste, seeing it as a product of man rather than vice versa. In the words of Buddha, "No man is by birth an outcaste



and by deeds is one a Brahmin" (quoted in Ryan 1953:33).

Absent from the Sinhalese system and its development has been the Brahmin caste, latterly so central to our understanding of the Indian system (see, for example, Dumont 1966 and Das 1977). Traditionally, it was the king who was responsible for the organisation of caste. As Malalgoda writes:

'In India the caste system was maintained and consolidated by the priestly authority of the Brahmins; in Ceylon, no priestly caste existed. The consolidation and legitimation of caste in Ceylon, therefore, was a secular function mainly in the hands of the political authority of the king.'

(Malalgoda 1976:46)

The essential link which existed in India between status and religion was virtually absent in the Sinhalese expression of caste. Although at one time crucial in recruitment to the priesthood, caste and religion now run parallel rather than as one, the latter providing a social conscience where abuse of the former is in evidence.

The markedly secular orientation of Sinhalese caste has often led to confusion as commentators attempt to understand it in terms of the Indian system. A case in point is Yalman's analysis of ritual purity and pollution (Yalman 1963), the subject of a recent critique by Kendrick, who concludes that 'Sinhalese caste is not to do with ritual status or purity', but rather with 'a traditional service tenure system under the control of the divine King' (Kendrick 1982:21).

However, despite the confusion in much of Yalman's

analysis, the fact still remains that the Beravā and castes similarly positioned in the hierarchy are identified with ideas of personal impurity and uncleanness: they do evoke distaste and even horror amongst members of the higher castes. Carrithers (personal communication) has even spoken of the Beravā being cited as the negative example when children are censured for being dirty: "Don't be dirty like the Beravā".

Whilst ideas such as these are no doubt deeply engrained in Sinhalese psychology many of the more explicit aspects of caste have been repressed or at least concealed in the conflict between caste and contemporary drives towards democracy. The ideology of egalitarianism espoused by the British colonisers and since independence by Sri Lankan governments has given no public place to the institution of caste. This is not to say, however, that caste is not a powerful force in Sinhalese society. In general it is a private affair about which people are reluctant to talk, 'like sex in Victorian society', as one commentator put it (Jiggins 1979:7). The kings whose responsibility it was to uphold caste law are long since passed as are the colonial administrators who displaced them. Today there is little that could be identified as a unifying ideological force, yet caste intrudes from street sweeping to presidential politics. Questions of parentage, pedigree, mutual status and the appropriateness of marriage partners are of primary importance for most

Sinhalese and as such there are few areas of social interaction where caste is not a potential component.

A visitor to Sri Lanka might be excused for failing to 'see' caste but any prolonged immersion in Sinhalese society soon reveals the gentle but firm lines and boundaries of caste demarcation and influence. This is particularly so if one aligns oneself with those at the bottom of the hierarchy, for whom the lines are most firmly drawn and the boundaries which separate most firmly asserted.

Surprisingly, there is only one major study of the institution of caste in Sri Lanka and that is the extensive work produced by Bryce Ryan in the early 1950's. Most anthropologists have found it necessary to comment at some point upon this most pervasive of institutions, but by and large its study has remained peripheral to the major concerns of land tenure, kinship and marriage, with the village microcosm as the main unit of study.[1] Obviously, these provide the empirical building blocks of caste but the apparently incidental interest in caste can be attributed to two features particular to the Sinhalese system.

Firstly, there is the relatively small number of castes which comprise the system. Ryan (1953:93) gives a complete list of contemporary castes and their approximate order of rank: the total comes to twenty five. Furthermore, many of the castes listed are numerically so



small as to be of questionable significance as castes, and are only to be found in particular localities. Thus in any one locality it is more than likely that a small number of castes will be encountered. For example, Yalman (1967) in his study of the village of Terutenne mentions only four castes, the Blacksmiths, Potters, Washermen and Drummers, besides the predominant Cultivator or Goyigama caste. Not surprisingly, Yalman tells us that, 'In traditional communities like Terutenne the institution is simple and uncomplicated' (ibid: 58).

The second reason for the ease of assimilation of the question of caste into the writings of anthropologists relates to the ascendancy of the Goyigama or Cultivator caste in Sinhalese society, both in terms of numbers and status. In Terutenne, Yalman (ibid: 62) tells us they outnumber the other castes by four to one, probably a typical proportion for a traditional agricultural community. The 1824 census, one of the last to include data on caste, gives the figure for the Goyigama as 54.3% in the maritime provinces of the South and West of the island (census tables reproduced in Roberts 1982:301). Jiggins (1979:35) in her own estimates of caste size still sees the Goyigama as clearly the largest caste but suggests that earlier figures were over-estimated, making less justifiable Goyigama supremacy on numerical grounds alone.

In terms of status, the Goyigama are the traditional

landholding and farming caste, occupying the prime position in the status hierarchy. Their hegemony in Sinhala Buddhist society has been almost total, with the possible exception of the Fisherman (Karāva), Cinnamon-peelers (Salāgama) and Toddy-tappers (Durāva) who have gained increasing economic power through their traditional occupations (see Roberts 1982). With the exception of these three castes, the Goyigama stand in an extremely powerful position to the other castes who are not only of greatly inferior status to them but also numerically small by comparison, accounting for less than a quarter of the total caste population.

The castes which remain can be conveniently classified as the service castes, each of which had its own hereditary occupation. The main service castes still found in the south of Sri Lanka today are as follows: Metal-workers (Navandannō), Lime-burners (Hunu), Palanquin-bearers (Batgama), Potters (Badahālla), Washermen (Hēna or Radā), Jaggery-makers (Vahumpura), and finally Drummer (Beravāyō). Each of these castes supplied their various services, many of which had ceremonial as well as purely practical aspects, to state and society in return for access to cultivable lands under a feudal tenure system (rājakāriya). [2]

Whilst status differences exist between the service castes, these differences are small in comparison to those between the overall category of service castes and the



Goyigama caste. Rooted in the traditional feudal hierarchy, the ascendancy of the Goyigama has remained unchecked. The service castes, particularly in rural areas, remain satellites to the central Goyigama core, small village clusters dotted in a Goyigama landscape.

It is interesting to note in this respect that the Karāva, Salāgama and Durāva castes who have effected a shift in status vis a vis the Goyigama were not involved in inter-caste service relationships of the type associated with the traditional service castes and neither did their occupations have a ceremonial dimension. They remained, by and large, outside of the feudal structure based on paddy cultivation (Roberts 1982:48).

Although frequently identified by their 'natural' occupations, the relationship which many castes have to their hereditary professions is complex. Many members of the service castes are, and long since have been, land-owners and cultivators, the relationship with hereditary profession being entirely nominal. Indeed, many of the services they once supplied no longer exist, such as Palanquin-bearing. Within the castes, changes and adaptations have taken place both in the nature of the services provided and the ways in which they are provided. Categories have persisted independently of content as traditional skills have been transposed into modern contexts and wholly new ones acquired. In the

Low-Country, the link between services and land-tenure is considered something of a relic, and most services, where they follow caste associated patterns at all, are done for payment in cash and kind.

Whatever the changes in the castes themselves, however, their identification as discrete units within the wider system still remains strong. As Ryan (ibid:341) puts it:

'If the modern transition is towards the disorganisation of the caste hierarchy, it is not so clearly towards the disorganisation of castes as structural entities in society.'

The divisions and the differences which the caste system expresses still prevail over twenty-five years after Ryan's account of caste in Sri Lanka as a system in transition. Caste, particularly in rural areas, still provides an important means of classifying the social universe into categories, which for the most part can remain otherwise undifferentiated with respect to each other. In the next section, I would like to look more closely at the Beravā as a 'structural entity' and an undifferentiated category in the Sinhalese caste system, their position within it and attitudes towards them.

### 1.3 The Beravā in Sinhalese society

Members of the Beravā caste are to be found scattered throughout Sinhala Buddhist society. They are most concentrated in the Southern Province around Mātara.



Tangalle and Galle. The 1824 census (Roberts ibid:301) puts their frequency in Tangalle district, which then incorporated Mātara and Hambantota districts, at 3.4%. This figure accounts for 48.2% of the total Beravā population in the Maritime Provinces at that time. Using these figures and data from the Department of Census and Statistics of the Government of Sri Lanka (1974:55), I would estimate, and I emphasise that this is a very rough estimate, that the population of Beravā people in the Southern Provinces, that is Galle, Mātara and Hambantota districts, is in the region of 50,000 in the present day.

Whilst, like many of the low castes, the Beravā have been drawn into the anonymity of urban settings, seeking release from caste strictures in wage labour, they still form a crucial component of the rural social order. Their communities, maybe as few as five or six households but rarely exceeding fifty, are found sporadically throughout the South. More often than not such settlements are spatially separated from those of their high caste neighbours. Spatial separation is given conceptual reinforcement in the use of certain terms for their places of residence, for example, the term 'mulla', meaning corner or boundary, and the term 'gubbāyama' (a corruption of the word kuppāyama meaning a settlement of outcastes), were both used on occasion by Goyigama informants when referring to local Beravā communities.

In recent years, families from many of the numerically

small, low castes have been able to slip their caste through name changing, urban migration, and the like, in many cases adopting Goyigama status (Ryan 1953:319). The Beravā, however, by virtue of their numbers and the role they play in the traditional caste hierarchy, appear to have retained more firmly than ever their caste identity.

The Beravā are a low caste (adu kūlaya) and are ranked low in the status hierarchy. They are considered impure (apirisiḍu) and dirty (kilutu) by members of the higher castes, who incidentally include most of the other service castes. That they are 'impure' and 'dirty' is reflected in the attitudes of distancing and avoidance adopted towards them in certain areas of interaction. Whilst members of the Beravā caste acknowledged and accepted their lowly position in the caste hierarchy this was often translated into more easily quantifiable terms such as "we are poor" (apī duppat). The qualities attributed from without the caste, are, not surprisingly, displaced onto groups, families, and ultimately individuals of lower status within the caste. None of my informants personally acknowledged themselves impure or dirty in the sense that the traditional order decrees they are.

Traditionally the discrepancy in status between castes has been expressed and asserted in an elaborate code of avoidance and separation. Nowadays many of the more public strictures placed on castes like the Beravā



have been lifted or else atrophied in more enlightened times. A Beravā man or boy has no qualms nowadays about covering the top half of his body in public, an action which not so long ago would have provoked violent sanctions from high caste people confronted with such a breach of restrictions.[3] Similarly, Beravā men can nowadays wear their hair in the dignified traditional top-knot (konḍe), a practice at one time forbidden to them along with the wearing of beards. Nowadays, they can live in houses with tiles on the roofs rather than plaited palm fronds. In general the bitterness and indignity which went as an integral part of low-caste membership is greatly diluted. Inter-caste conflict is mostly kept below the surface and only occasionally erupts into violent confrontation. In general, a passive acceptance of the traditional order with its various negative discriminations has ensured a safe social passage for members of the lower castes, but there are signs that this order is being increasingly challenged by those who have long suffered under it. Uncoupled from its feudal underpinnings and drifting into periods of ever greater socio-economic change, the question of caste becomes a problem not only for social commentators but also for the Sinhalese themselves.

Despite the dilution in rigidity of restrictions and a growing rejection of the consequences of ignoble birth there are still many areas where caste remains strong.

### 1.3.1 Commensality

The possibility of inter-caste dining in the home, for example, is still remote, the rules of commensality still being rigorously observed. Ryan goes so far as to state that in certain areas, 'the caste status hierarchy can be most clearly determined from the patterns of permissible eating' (Ryan 1953:159). The household table and the food ranged upon it provide a symbolically loaded arena in which statements about status and equality can be powerfully made. To eat rice together with a man in his home is at once a gesture of hospitality and also a statement of equality between host and guest.[4]

In the normal course of events, a Berava person will not be allowed near a high caste table but one occasion where rules of commensality are partially waived is during the night long exorcism and healing ceremonies. During such ceremonies, it is customary for the performers to be offered a rice meal. The petty drama which I have seen unfold on numerous such occasions stems from the conflict between hosts who are being hospitable without actually wishing to appear hospitable, and on the other hand, guests who accept the hospitality but are duty bound to reject it as inadequate. The ritual patron, whilst providing food, will often minimise the obvious discomfort brought on by such an apparently legitimate low caste intrusion by having them eat separately from other guests and by pointing out that they must serve themselves in the



absence of someone to wait on them, the usual procedure with guests. However, the line, fine as it is, between minimal hospitality and downright shoddy treatment must not be crossed for fear of 'upsetting' the performers who may either jeopardise the performance or even extract some occult revenge at a later date. Seated at a high caste table, the performers will often exploit the inversion to the maximum, giving orders and criticising, making it abundantly clear that they had expected something a little better. They too, however, must be careful not to overstep the mark which would result in their castigation and a possible refusal to pay them for their services rendered.

Whilst, as we have seen above, there are occasions on which Beravā people might eat from the table of high caste people, the inverse is only exceptionally true. Although high caste people frequently visit Beravā households in the course of business or pleasure, it is rare that they will accept anything more than light refreshment.

#### 1.3.11 Etiquette

In the realm of inter-caste etiquette the Beravā are still the subject of minor actions expressing more deep-rooted ideas of distance and separation. I was often surprised by the number of people who would disclaim prejudice and disavow the caste system as an obsolete

antiquity, yet in the course of interaction with Beravā people would resort to striking symbols of social differentiation. The half-chair (putuva bāgaya) is still produced, as if from nowhere, when a Beravā person enters a high-caste house. Thus, when all sit down, he is left head and shoulders below everybody else. If offered refreshment on such an occasion, it is likely to be passed single handedly and served in a cracked cup, possibly without handles. (A high-caste or high status visitor will receive tea or beverage served on a tray, in a cup and saucer, passed with both hands.) A low-caste visitor to a high-caste house will not usually enter through the front door but will avoid the main entrance and verandah, seeking access at the rear. Failure to comply with this avoidance of the front of the house may result in a scolding or at worst a beating for the offender. In the presence of high-caste people, a Beravā person will remain standing, unless specifically requested to do otherwise.

In all the above examples it is difficult to establish to what extent there is complicity on the part of the Beravā and to what extent there is an actual threat of enforcement should some violation of inter-caste expectations take place. For example, I knew a schoolteacher who, as far as I could tell, was genuine in his claim that he had tried to stop people using the half-chair when they visited his house, but they had insisted on doing so as a mark of respect to him. On the



other hand, one local businessman seemed to take a certain pride in publically disgracing Beravā men who were unfortunate enough to be known to him. The response on such occasions was to acknowledge with quiet humility the consequences of their birth.

#### 1.3.111. Naming and reference

Discrimination for the Beravā extends beyond purely physical interaction into the very language of interaction itself. terms of reference and address themselves embodying notions of separation and hierarchy. The caste are referred to as the 'Beravā Kūliya', the Beravā caste, a name which associates them with their traditional occupation of drumming, an activity considered very demeaning. The Beravā themselves, however, prefer the title 'Nākat Kūliya' or else 'Nākatī Minissu', the Nākat caste or people, a title which associates them with the more elevated and honourable profession of astrology (Nākat means asterism). Generally, however, outsiders avoid caste reference and stick to neutral but no less differentiating usages such as 'ē gollō', simply 'those people'.

At an interpersonal level, modes of reference and address are important indicators of mutual status. In everyday interaction, it is polite to refer to persons either by their title, or even by their profession. Thus, most high caste men will be addressed and referred to as

mahattayā, meaning sir or gentleman; policemen will be referred to as rālahāmi; and policewomen as hāmini, shopkeepers as mudalālī etc. A Berava man will never knowingly be addressed as mahattayā and more often than not will be addressed directly by name, thus breaking something of an unspoken taboo on the direct use of personal names. This direct use of personal names is on occasion taken one step further with the actual distortion of personal names. For example, I have heard a high caste woman address a Beravā man by his name, Gomez, and add onto the end of it the suffix -yā, making the name Gomezyā. The use of this suffix on a personal name is a provocative and insulting form often used as invective. On this occasion, the usage was taken as normal by both parties.

Personal names, in addition to being used directly, are often in themselves distinctive. Although not entirely specific to the Beravā, the tendency to adopt contrived names from non-Sinhalese sources is often indicative of low-caste status. One of the more common forms is the addition of -is to names of Western origin. Thus, to give but a few examples, one finds names such as Elmis, Arlis, Pinteris, Pinduris, Jāmis, Supiris, etc. Others use the same ending but attach Sinhalese beginnings such as Sirinelis, Jayaneris, Babōris, Suvandiris etc. There are many names which are direct corruptions of European names such as Wilbat, Wilman, Ritchel, Midgel,



Seetin, etc. and many which are fairly familiar European names, for example, Albert, Martin, Peter, Charlie, Cyril, Solomon, etc. Nowadays, there is a tendency to give children more caste anonymous names of purely Sinhalese derivation. For older generations, however, the wonderfully contrived birth names of many Beravā men is still an indication of the time when they were not thought fit to have 'good' Sinhalese names.[5]

Consistent with the direct use of personal names as a means of structuring inter-personal relations is the use of personal pronouns. The system of pronoun usage, although nowadays far less complex than it once was, is still reflective of relations of power and hierarchy, containing as it does numerous asymmetrical pronouns. The pronouns range from highly specialised ones, such as svāminvahānse used in addressing a priest and ṭamunanse used to people of high social standing, down through pronouns indicative of equality and familiarity, such as oyā and ohē. At the lower end of the scale there are pronouns which imply a relationship of inferiority between the addresser and the addressee. The terms umba and tō, although used as terms of respect in older literature, are used quite devastatingly in common parlance as expressions of insult and contempt in dispute and confrontation. These terms are also used to address people of the lower castes. In day to day interaction, Beravā people would still be publicly

addressed as umba.

In the course of my own interaction with people of the Beravā caste, the rather elementary question of how to address them was something of a problem. As with most 'problems' encountered by anthropologists with their informants, however, the eventual outcome was heuristic as they often highlighted structures and processes which for the most part remained latent. Only in the course of time did I realise that my early attempts to get on 'first name terms', which to me was a measure of closeness and acceptance, was in fact mildly offensive, replicating the external view of them as without social personae. Invariably, I was addressed as mahattayā. My attempts to erase or minimise the status discrepancy implicit in our mutual pronoun usages, that is to make the pronouns reciprocal, by getting them to call me Bob or else me calling them mahattayā, on occasion flattered but mostly made them uneasy: both strategies were doomed to failure. Wherever possible, I came to avoid pronouns and names which in itself was distancing. However, one usage which was at once respectful and acceptable was that of gurunnāṅse or teacher. This term was used to address the older men with whom I came to work closely, the dancers and drummers in particular. My role as pupil was consistent not only with my endeavours as an anthropologist, but also with their position in society as the receptacles of extensive traditional knowledge.



For the families with whom I spent most time, increasing familiarity came to be expressed by my partial incorporation into the kinship system. Among my contemporaries I was treated, and on occasion addressed, as massina, that is as a brother-in-law and consequently attitudes were familiar and jocular. Whilst amongst adults it took many months to acquire this status in the kinship system, my location in this category by children was expressed almost from my first contact with the Beravā. To them I was sudu māma, the 'white uncle', a classificatory mother's brother.

#### 1.3.iv. Endogamy

In the above paragraphs I have enumerated the various ways in which action and attitude towards the Beravā combined with distinctive symbols and signs of caste and status serve to differentiate and separate the Beravā from other sections of society. However, there are many social arenas in which caste does not intrude, such as in worship, dining in public places and in work, all of which may be carried on communally without direct necessity for caste segregation. As stated previously, caste is legitimated by neither state nor religion. It is essentially bound up with questions of social position and status at the level of the private, the domestic and the

interfamilial. The home and the family remains the hub which upholds and keeps distinct the broader categories of which the overall system is composed. In this respect I would like to turn briefly to the question of endogamy, the sine qua non of caste.

Perhaps nowhere is the issue of mutual family status and the maintenance of caste categories more strongly expressed than in the keenly observed practice of endogamy. Like marry like, and children acquire the caste identity of their parents. The system is self-perpetuating and the units which comprise it self-contained with regard to kinship and marriage. No external agency upholds or oversees the rules of endogamy, the strictures coming from within the castes themselves, or rather the family groupings which comprise the caste.

To be more precise, however, caste endogamy for the Sinhalese is not a rule as such but rather it is expressed in the idiom of the Dravidian kinship system which, as a classificatory system, not only provides systematic kinship categories but also defines preferential marriage partners. Endogamy, unlike exogamy, which is based on a precisely defined group, is the product of accumulated and accumulating marriages. The boundaries of the resulting groups or kindreds are by definition loose and potentially extendable as new marriages are contracted between more distant category relations. Attempts to attribute a concrete reality to such 'groups' within the caste, let



alone to a caste as whole, are bound to fail, as did Yalman's attempts to identify the pavula or kindred as the endogamous unit of Sinhalese caste (Yalman 1962:552, cf. Tambiah 1965 for critique). The classificatory system outlines who one may marry and marriages tend to occur where marriages occurred before, that is with close kin who are ideally of equal status (cf. Stirrat 1977) while the end result might be construed as the appearance of an endogamous group, that is, marriage taking place with the caste with the tendency for marriage to take place within kindreds, the process whereby this is arrived at is in large part due to the cumulative result of preferential marriages and alliance.[6] As will be illustrated in Chapter 3, endogamy provides one strategy for the concentration of property and the preservation of ritual and craft elites within the caste.

In general the interpretation placed on the institution of endogamy in caste society has been in terms of the perpetuation or protection of some 'caste substance' or other. Whether this 'substance' be conceptualised in biological terms such as blood (lē) and the purity of descent, as for example does Yalman (1963:27 and 1967:58), or else in purely sociological terms such as status (tatvaya) and the importance of equality in alliance (cf. Kendrick 1982:20), it is readily apparent from inter-caste attitudes that the Beravā have less 'substance' where other people have more.

Cross-caste marriage would result in the confusion of categories and the loss or dilution of 'caste substance'; a situation that those who have it are at pains to avoid. Yalman (1963) sees female purity as crucial in this respect. The female is the gateway through which 'pollution' (ibid:41) might enter the caste and the protection of female sexuality is thus a primary concern. The sexual defilement which a man incurs as a result of sexual relations with a low-caste woman is of a temporary nature and can be removed by washing. It is thus not uncommon for a high caste man to have a low-caste concubine or else enter into casual sexual relations with a low caste woman. No doubt this aspect of caste ideology could be used to explain why, in the town of Akuressa, rumours often circulated to the effect that my interest in the various local Berava communities was to be explained solely in terms of sexual exploitation of their women!

The inverse of the above, however, is viewed with abhorrence and was at one time punishable by death:

'...And if any females should be so deluded, as to commit folly with one beneath herself, if ever she should appear to the sight of her friends, they would certainly kill her, there being no other way to wipe off the dishonour she hath done the family, but by her own blood.'

(Knox 1681:195-6 cited in Pieris 1956:179)

A high caste woman having sexual relations with a low caste man would result in the woman becoming internally 'polluted', as would be the children arising from such a



union. Not surprisingly, the points of contact between high caste women and low caste men are viewed as highly dangerous. This danger is further amplified by a vague mythology which attributes Beravā men with the power to charm and seduce women, in a somewhat similar fashion to gypsy men in our own mythology. Contact between high and low, women and men, is minimised and seen as highly irregular, although it does undergo a fascinating reversal in the course of exorcism ceremonies where a female patient will publically submit herself to the power of the exorcist in exchanges which have markedly sexual undertones.

Whilst most of the manifestations of caste outlined in the earlier parts of this section can be waived by more liberal individuals, it is unlikely that inter-caste marriage would ever be condoned. Particularly, if the match was a daughter who wished to marry a low caste man. The horror which the idea of Beravā-ness is likely to arouse is nowhere more keenly felt than in relation to the idea of cross-caste matches.

The Beravā for their part also assert integrity through endogamy, not wishing to lose the status and purity which they nevertheless believe themselves to have. They too deplore and avoid marrying beneath themselves. The only case of cross-caste marriage I came across in the communities in which I worked was a Berava girl who had eloped with a man from the Washerman or Hēnayā caste. The

girl's family were poor and the couple had taken up residence in the man's village. It appeared likely that the girl and her children would ultimately be absorbed into the Henaya caste. Although status differences between these two castes are small it is interesting to note that the union was hypergamous from the point of view of the Beravā.

I do not wish to say anything more at this point on the question of endogamy other than that I, along with most of my informants, Beravā and otherwise, took caste endogamy as given, attitudes and strictures being such that the question of caste exogamy rarely arises.

#### 1.3.v Wider forms of exclusion

Many aspects of caste as it relates to the Beravā in Sinhalese society would be of little significance if taken in isolation. However, added together in practice they do become explicit indicators of a more fundamental structural marginalisation which excludes them from the crucial triangle of power in Sinhalese society: politics, economics and religion.

Politically, the Beravā are a small and almost insignificant minority. Scattered as they are in small pockets over wide areas their political affiliation is of little consequence.[7] Most of my informants around Akuressa voted communist, largely in response to the energy and personal charisma of Dr. S.A. Wickremasingha



who held the Akuressa seat for the Communist Party from 1936 until 1977. In other areas my informants appeared to be solidly S.L.F.P. (Sri Lanka Freedom Party) still, apparently because of the memory of S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake who championed the case of the common man and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. However, the relatively small numbers of Beravā people throughout the island make their influence at a local level, let alone at a national level, minimal.

Similarly, as a group the Beravā have little power and credibility in economic terms. They are largely landless and poor, having scant material backing to validate any claim to position or power. Exceptions did exist but were all but lost in the anonymity of urban settings; 'those people cannot stoop' (ē gollo naminna bā) as one informant put it, referring to some of his distant Beravā kinsmen who had achieved material success. For the majority, who remain either locked into a strong rural identity or else form a component of the anonymous pool of wage labourers found on the fringe of major towns, the possibility of translating any surplus they may have into productive resources outside of the immediate community, such as business or land, remain remote.

Thirdly, the Beravā are still largely excluded from entering the Buddhist priesthood. This is traditionally the case with the oldest and largest fraternity, the Siyam Nikāya which is limited solely to people of the Goyigama

caste. The second oldest fraternity, the Amarapura Nikāya, although a response by non-Goyigama castes to the Goyigama monopoly on the priesthood, is, in the area of fieldwork, almost totally dominated by members of the Karāva, Salāgama and Durāva castes. The most recent fraternity, the Rāmāñña Nikāya founded in 1864, is thought to be the most indiscriminating in terms of caste background provided they have sufficient religious motivation. Amongst my Beravā informants were some of the most devout Buddhists I came across throughout my stay, yet I never heard of a single man or boy who had entered the priesthood. Despite the rejection of caste professed by the Rāmāñña Nikāya it is still a fact that without the back-up of established networks of family and economic influence, the possibility of entering even this Nikāya is remote for Beravā males.

Finally, I would like to say a word about education and its significance for groups like the Beravā. Access to formal education is now almost universal in Sri Lanka. Competition is high and the ethos for achievement often borders on the fanatical. The assumption of common access to educational possibilities, whatever the reality, is a means whereby all can participate in the process of democracy. Achievement is based on merit and ability, and for those denied access to the power domains outlined above, education provides one of the few realistic possibilities for social mobility.



In the past the Beravā were formally denied access to education or at best segregated from other groups in school. Consequently, there was a tendency to fall back upon traditional channels of education such as the local priest and kinsmen. The latter were also responsible for imparting knowledge particular to the caste as well as for tuition in literacy and numeracy. Nowadays attendance at school is not affected by caste status in any formal sense, although I did know of a number of children who were kept off school by their parents as a result of harassment by high caste children. In these cases, as in the past, the children were falling back on resources within the community for their education, with boys often taking up the specialisations of their fathers. Despite instances such as these, the pressure on children to achieve at school is strong, however unrealistic parental aspirations may be. Most of the generation with whom I worked were old enough to remember the discrimination their caste had suffered in the not too distant past. That their children should succeed where they were previously excluded was strongly impressed upon them. The kinsman who was a schoolteacher and the one who was a traffic policeman were both hailed as examples of what educational achievement might hold.

Whilst pressure to achieve at school is strong, the lack of objective possibilities once education is completed places the responsibility for the absorption and

employment of young men back with kinsmen. As far as possible, young people are assimilated in the range of occupations and occupational networks determined through family ties.

Up until this point little has been said about the relation between caste and occupation. In the next section I would like to examine the socio-historical relationship between caste and occupation as a prelude to describing the occupations of the Beravā in the present day.

#### 1.4 Caste and occupation: the Beravā

Nowadays the Beravā are one of the few castes who have retained a strong identity in terms of their traditional ritual occupations. The names by which many castes are known may be the only link they have with their traditional occupation but the Beravā remain, by and large, the people who beat the drums and charm the demons. Traditional occupations are practised by a minority within the caste yet the identification with such occupations, either through direct practice or familial association, is an important source of the Beravā caste's lowly status and social position. Their role has been to deal with the negative and potentially disordering forces at work in the cosmos.

In oral mythology the ritual service castes were believed to have been created by King Mahasammata, the 'Great Elect', the first contractual king who brought



order to the world by creating a division of labour amongst men, allotting certain tasks to certain groups. As Hocart reports:

'The Sinhalese villagers who described the function of the drummers say it was the mythical king Mahasammata who decreed that only certain persons were to carry out the demon ceremonies.'

(Hocart 1950:51)

Historically, it was the king who was responsible for the upholding of the caste regime in society. It was to him, or rather his local representative, the disāvē or raṭemahātmayā, that the populace were required to pay duty and perform specific services, in return for which, access to cultivable lands was given.

'The Sinhalese conception of property in land always assumed that title was contingent on the performance of "service", ranging from formal homage, eg., the annual presentation of a bundle of betel leaves, to laborious duties such as tilling the soil and carrying burdens.'

(Pieris 1956:44)

From the various castes were recruited workers to provide rājakāriya or 'king's duty', as the feudal service tenure system was called. In general it was the responsibility of those performing rājakāriya duties to provide ceremonial and ritual services periodically and in addition to the entirely secular pursuits of agriculture and cultivation. Castes became identified by the occupations ceremonial or otherwise which they supplied on an hereditary basis to the state.'

The name Berava is a shortened form of the term bera vādana, meaning literally 'the sound of the drum', a

title which indicates their traditionally recognised occupation as drum musicians. No doubt at some point in the past migrant specialists from India brought with them the art and skills of drumming which were subsequently integrated into Buddhist religion and polity. Ryan conjectures that the Berava caste:

'...whatever its specific origin, retains something of the degraded status of the Hindu Paraiyan, with whom the caste name is shared in derivation...'

(1953:13)

The Janavamsa, the fifteenth century chronicle of the Sinhalese people, described the Beravā as 'musicians, weavers and often astrologers' (quoted in Ariyapala 1956:291). Drumming and astrology have remained up to the present important occupations of the Beravā, whilst weaving, in the south at least, has disappeared without trace.

It is in the sphere of drumming, as their caste title suggests, that the Beravā are most widely known. Coomaraswamy describes their services as follows:

'Davul Panguva. The tenement held by tenants of the tom-tom beater caste (Beravāyō). In temples their service came under a kind called the pīṭa kaṭṭalē (out-door service). At the daily tēvāva (musical service), at art fetivals, at pinkam and on journeys of the incumbent, they beat the hēvisi (tom-tom). On their turn of duty in a temple, they had to watch the temple and its property, to sweep and clean the premises, to gather flowers for offering, and to fetch bolpān (water for temple use). The services of the musician (hēvisi-kāriyā) were required by lay proprietors only occasionally, for weddings, funerals, yak and bali ceremonies and on state occasions. This class of persons was



employed in weaving cloth, and their penuma (tribute) consisted of a taduppu-cloth or a kerchief. The performance of bali ceremonies was one of the principal services of the tenants of the tom-tom beater caste.'  
(1908:25)

In the Kandyan kingdom the drummers occupied their own department called the beravābadde, the services they provided from such departments are described by Davy (1821):

'They are weavers by trade, and had to pay tax in money for their lands, supply the royal stores monthly in vegetables, provide wooden gutters of the kitul-gaha, and in some districts furnish a certain quantity of cloth of their own making. Particular families have lands for beating the tom-tom, dancing and piping etc. at great festivals; others have portions of church lands for performing in temples.'

(quoted in Pieris 1956:186)

An important link between the occupations as they were designated then, and the descendants of those early exponents, is to be found in contemporary vāsagama or family names. These patrilineally transmitted 'surnames' contain information about villages or origin, occupation and specially bestowed honorific titles. Amongst the Beravā some vāsagama names point to ancient and now extinct occupations. The prefix hēva-, for example, meaning soldier, is a possible survival from the time when drummers were to be found in the King's service leading soldiers into battle. Others, such as Vardiasingha, literally 'Lion Musicians', suggest an earlier role as court musicians; Mutuhēva, meaning 'Pearl Soldiers' had possibly been passed on from a time when they practised

the ancient art of pearl threading used in the making of costumes. This particular skill is perhaps still to be found in the making and decoration of costumes for exorcism ceremonies. The most common vāsagama titles however, connect the Beravā with the vocations of drumming and astrology. Most Beravā people will possess in their surnames one of four titles which indicate caste occupation. For drumming these names are Panikkalayagē and Singārakkārāgē, both of which mean drummer. For astrology they are Nākatigē and Ganitagē. It is not clear exactly where these names came from, whether they were imposed from outside by an earlier king or Portuguese administrator, or else they were developed within the caste. Today the names bear little relation to the actual occupations of those who carry them but they still provide important caste indicators.

The picture which emerges of the Beravā in medieval times is of small endogamous groups of families to whom had been assigned the role of providing certain specialist services to the royal court, the temple and to private patrons. These services were provided in addition to the pursuit of agriculture and other menial activities. The types of service provided fell clearly into two categories, which, following Yalman (1967:67), I shall call the public and the private. Amongst the public services were those performed by the Beravā as contributions to larger celebrations of state and



religion. These services were primarily drumming, which was provided on ceremonial and ritual occasions in conjunction with the services of other castes. Private services on the other hand were performed solely by the Beravā to individual patrons and on a contractual basis. These services included the performance of healing rituals and the practice of astrology, both of which relied on a range of skills transmitted within the caste. The public services received reward through the granting of land, which provided the main source of subsistence. The private services received payment in kind and, along with other non-specialist services, supplemented income.

Through their provision of hereditary drumming services in the public sphere, the Beravā were an integral part of the highly ordered and articulated feudal hierarchy centered on kingship. In the Highlands of Sri Lanka the momentum of this very ordered vision of society and cosmology has continued into the present day. Despite the lapse of 150 years since the end of the Kandyan kingdom, rājakāriya still prevails in many highland areas and the provision of the specialist services to temples and at state ceremonies is still underpinned by service tenure arrangements.

Referring particularly to the Beravā, Gombrich says:

'In Mīgala these drummers are attached to the temple as feudal villeins; they have an hereditary right to tenure of lands owned by the temple in return for which they must perform hereditary services.'

(1971:125)

and a little further on:

'Drummers, however, perform a service which is principally required for the Buddha, and is therefore in continued demand. Any temple of some age - say fifty years - is almost certain to hold land, and some of this land is probably leased (sic given) to drummers in return for their professional services. Although drumming is not the only caste bound profession... it is the only one, at least in the area where I worked which is regularly associated with service tenures, and this to such an extent that the term rājakāriyō, literally 'workers' for the king, which used to designate all feudal villeins, is now widely taken to refer to drummers living off temple lands.'

(ibid)[8]

In the Highlands of the island then, the association between services and land tenure was, and still remains, highly significant. The Beravā are still, it would appear, in receipt of service tenures for the provision of drumming services at public ritual and ceremonial. Drumming is what they are known for and continues to provide the means whereby they can enter the agricultural base. Occupational diversification has no doubt taken place but the Beravā still operate within a traditional

#### ADDENDA.

Service tenures were not in fact abolished under this act in 1832 but persisted under the name ' rājakāriyā ' despite basic alterations in the structure of the tenure system.

Buddhism and the protection of its institutions, the temples were progressively outmanoeuvred and their claims



on service tenants gradually whittled away by commutation and the reversion of temple lands to the crown (Seneviratne 1979:153-155). The process continued into the present day with various other acts and land reforms, leading Seneviratne to conclude that:

'The directions of change are towards stripping Kandyan ritual of its expressions of 'feudal' superordinations and subordinations.'

(ibid:167)

But, the process is far from complete and rājakāriya in the form of service to the temples still persists. One can only assume that the persistence of service tenures of this type is as a result of the enormous power and influence, both religious and political, that the temples wield and have wielded in the past.

This state of affairs is quite different from the South where rājakāriya appears to have sunk virtually without trace. The service tenure system and the feudal structure of which it was a part suffered considerably under the impact of the Portuguese from 1505 onwards and subsequently under the Dutch (1685-1795). Information concerning the fate of service tenures during this period is scant but, despite the fact that Kandy remained a powerful centre of religious and political influence, Buddhism in the Maritime provinces lost its state patronage and was the subject of severely repressive measures (Malalgoda 1976:28). Conversion to Christianity and the propagation of European culture was used as a strategy to weaken central Kandyan control and accentuate

political divisions between Low and Up-Country (ibid:37). A key element in this strategy was the coercion and conversion of the nobility which further served to split Buddhism and the state. The 'ordered vision of society and cosmology' to which I referred above in the context of the Kandyan Highlands, was in the South long disrupted even before the arrival of the British.[9]

Given the decline into which Buddhism went under the Portuguese and Dutch, we can infer that the Beravā, as the providers of their public services at temple and state ceremonial, were also affected by these broader changes. However, when Buddhism underwent a resurgence in the nineteenth century there were no royal endowments of land to the temples and instead they found their support amongst local patrons (Malalgoda 1976:259). In the structure which emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth century there was no secure place for the Beravā, unlike their Highland brethren for whom a feudal niche still persisted. Relationships still of course existed between particular Beravā families and local temples but the exchange was in most cases entirely contractual.

The shift from classical Sinhalese Buddhism with its reliance for support on political authority to a de-centralised and highly segmented monastic structure dependent on the laity for its support, affected fundamentally the Beravā and the services they supplied.



The shift from service to contract which Seneviratne refers to as a recent change in the employment of drummers at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy (1978:34), is a long established norm in the South. The only temple currently organising temple services along traditional rājakāriya lines, according to my informants, is the Mahā Vihāra at Tissamahārāma. The temples which sprang up in such numbers throughout the nineteenth century in the South, on the other hand, were rarely in a position to offer anything other than payment for occasional services. This process was also further compounded by commutation and the reversion of lands to the Crown. The public services mentioned above, such as drumming, effectively lost their state patronage and with the passage of the feudal hierarchy in the South, the symbolic link between service and caste was lost. The material link was also severed in that land tenure and certain services were no longer bound together (cf. the history of Beragoda in Chapter 2).

Drumming is essential at virtually all Buddhist ceremonial occasions and the Beravā still hold a monopoly in this area. However, the performance of public drumming services is no longer a focal point of caste activities. Nowadays neither drummers nor their patrons take the enterprise particularly seriously. Each temple makes its own arrangements regarding the employment of drummers and other specialists who often work in several temples in a particular locality.

The main point to be made from this rather speculative historical reconstruction is that the public services which the Beravā had been identified with, such as drumming in temples, in processions and at local state occasions etc. became one of a number of services provided on a contractual basis. Whereas in the Highlands public services remained of far greater importance than the private, in the Low-Country they became of equal significance when it came to earning a living.

Significantly, it is in the nineteenth century that many traditions (paramparāva) in more diverse fields commence (see Chapter 3, Section iv.). As well as the consolidation of traditions with which the caste had long been identified, such as exorcism and healing, other activities such as temple sculpture and decoration, carpentry and house-building established themselves as occupations performed by the caste. These occupations were performed by the Beravā to private patrons on a contractual basis with an increasing exploitation of the private sector.

The move into a 'market' situation, even in something as specialised as ritual performance, inevitably had its own transformative effects on the beliefs which underlay them. The emergence of a body of ritual specialists deriving their daily bread almost solely from the performance of exorcism and healing rituals added an inner dynamic to their development and expansion. For example,



one man recalled tales of how, when business was bad, his greatgrandfather (A.S. Pīno, born 1850, B4 genealogy pp 156) would take his Mahā Sohōna mask and, pointing it in a certain direction, blow charmed smoke through the eye-holes in the belief that someone would fall possessed in the line of its gaze. Competition and individual creativity brought to bear on the rich symbolism and imagery which characterises the lower orders of the Sinhalese cosmos, makes for a prolific cultural combination and a powerful vitality of traditional forms in this sector of the pantheon. The ritual traditions of the Highlands, on the other hand, are rather staid and conservative compared with their Low-Country counterparts. Gombrich says that in his area, devil-dancing was unknown and the performance of Bali ceremonies a rare event; his informants obviously had little experience of these matters (1971:198).

Thus, from their earliest roles as court musicians and ceremonial drummers at state religious ceremonies, the Beravā have developed in rather different directions in the Highlands and the Low-County of the island. For those who came to ply their services in the South, there has been a progressive diversification of occupation and enrichment of their stock of knowledge and skills. These changes have taken place against a backdrop of momentous historical changes to state and society since the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505.

The developments in caste services and their organisation, however, do not appear to have been paralleled amongst the Beravā in the Highlands who still retain something of their identity as feudal villeins.

The diversification and enrichment of caste activities which characterises the Beravā in the South are not limited solely to their ritual activities. This can be seen in the large numbers currently involved in carpentry and housebuilding, both as craftsmen and as unskilled labourers. An extension of these particular activities can be seen in the rise to prominence of the Beravā in the field of temple construction and decoration. Inevitably, however, the growth of population of the Beravā far outstrips the demand for the specialist services they have traditionally supplied. Nowadays, many families and indeed whole communities in some instances are alienated from the knowledge and skills which underpin many of the traditional services provided by the Beravā. In such cases, subsistence needs are met by resort to the vagaries of wage labour, such as in farming, labouring for irrigation schemes and government projects, working away from home in hotels and factories etc.

The occupational structure of the Beravā caste can be summarised diagrammatically in terms of a series of oppositions (see Figure 1 overleaf). The diagram is not intended to provide an accurate model of occupational structure but is rather a device to contextualise the



Diagram 1. The Occupational Structure of the Beravā.

Public.	Private.		
<p>Ceremonial Drumming: Drumming in temples, in processions and at various public events.</p>	Ritual.	Non-ritual.	
	<p>Performance of exorcism &amp; healing ceremonies, plus associ- ated activ- ities such as astrology.</p>	Skilled	Non- skilled.
		<p>Carpentry, Masonry, Temple art work, etc.</p>	<p>Menial jobs &amp; labour- ing.</p>

inter-relationship between the various categories of occupation currently carried out by the Beravā.

In Figure 1, the size of the spaces occupied by the various services is proportional to the caste specificity of those services. Thus, drumming is virtually a caste monopoly for the Beravā, whereas the activities carried out under the heading of non-skilled labour are non-caste specific. Public ceremonial drumming is the symbol from which the caste derives its occupational identity. Moving to the right in the diagram, occupations become less caste specific until on the far right we are left with the non-ritual, non-skilled labourers, for whom drumming is an empty sign by which they are still nevertheless identified.

Although my data on the numbers carrying out particular occupations within the caste is slim, I would estimate that the size of the spaces in the diagram is inversely proportional to the numbers within the caste currently engaged in those activities. Thus, the majority of Beravā men are nowadays engaged in semi-skilled and non-skilled wage labour, whilst the more specialist activities are carried out by a relatively small proportion within the caste.

The diagram also incorporates a temporal dimension in that the move from left to right reflects to a certain extent the developments in occupation as they have occurred in the South of Sri Lanka. The drift from public



to private, from ritual to non-ritual, from skilled to non-skilled activity is one that the caste has come to experience increasingly in recent years. Rapid social development and concomitant changes in peoples' needs have rendered many traditional skills and their exponents redundant. Alienation from the traditional niche which many Beravā activities occupy has left many Beravā with the double misfortune of being not only low caste but also low class.

Crucially however, despite occupational diversification, the Beravā are one of the few remaining groups to retain a strong caste identity from their occupational association. Indeed, I believe it is this association which enables us to account for the persistence of 'caste behaviour', interaction as a result of ritual activity being one of the few social arenas where mutual caste status is likely to be made explicit. This point will be reiterated and illustrated more fully in subsequent chapters but first I would like to look more closely at the relationship between caste identity and the occupations carried out by the Beravā.

### 1.5 Occupation and identity

If the hierarchy of status and purity upon which caste rests is to be maintained then there must inevitably be those whose lot in life it is to do the dirty work of others. The washerman, for example, spends his life

thrashing out the dirt and stains from the clothes of others in society. Through his actions the material dirt and impurities which are accumulated in day to day life are removed, the malign supernatural attention they might attract is averted and its consequences safely absorbed by the lowly washerman.

The Beravā, as a social category, have also performed the role of repository for the dirt and impurity of others. It is not, however, external dirt and impurity with which they have come to be associated but that which accumulates internally as a result of bad thought and bad action. The Beravā have come to be identified with the points in day to day experience where the negative forces at work in the cosmos threaten to flood into the human world causing sickness, disease and disorder. Through their ritual actions they have the wherewithal to absorb and take onto themselves the malign attentions of demons and spirits, thus averting attention away from others. Distance, expressed in marginality and structural inferiority is maintained at all times between them and the society they serve. Fear of contamination is great, but, like the 'inexorable facts' they deal with, the Beravā are also an 'inexorable fact' of Sinhalese life.

It is clear from the arguments presented above that occupation, both historically and in the present, is a key factor in the evaluation of the Beravā as low status within the caste hierarchy. In other words, they carry



out activities considered by others to be demeaning. Central in this respect is the fact that the works in which the Beravā have traditionally engaged have brought them into contact with potential sources of defilement and impurity. However, this relationship is complex and can be approached at a number of different levels.

In a purely material sense, the works in which the Beravā engage bring them into direct physical contact with the sources of extreme pollution. The drum, not surprisingly, is central in this respect. The eyes of drums are made from the stomachs of bulls and the thongs which keep the skins in tension, from strips of hide. Even though drummers do not in fact kill the animals but merely buy the requisite parts from a butcher, their continual contact with drums in their homes and in their work, does bring them into contact with a powerful source of pollution, namely the skins of dead animals. However, unlike in many parts of India where it is the actual contact with leather which gives musicians their polluted identity (for example see Searle-Chatterjee 1979:282), for the Beravā this is rarely cited as a source of their lowly status. Being Buddhist it is the killing of the animal which is the primary sin, to use the skin afterwards is a transgression of a secondary order.

In their role as funerary drummers, however, the Beravā do come into contact with an extremely powerful source of pollution (killa); the human corpse. The

pollution which emanates from the corpse, however, although extremely powerful, is of a temporary nature. The ritual impurity (killa) arising from contact with the dead, which is closely identified with caste purity in Hindu society, bears no similar relation in Sinhalese Buddhist society (Gombrich 1971:183). The presence of the Beravā beating their drums at the head of a funeral procession, while no doubt demeaning for those involved, might explain particular instances of impurity of members of the Beravā caste but does not explain caste impurity, that is, the general attitude towards the Beravā.

Whilst in many instances the contact which members of the Beravā caste have with sources of impurity and pollution in their occupations could be cited as a possible source of their lowly status, there are many facts which do not appear to fit. For example, why, if it is the source of pollution, is the drum, (and the drummer) to be found at the very heart of all Buddhist ceremonial?

A further negative aspect of the occupations of the Beravā is their long standing association with rituals of exorcism and healing. As a result of this association the Beravā have come to be strongly identified with the forces they deal with in the cosmos. Their lowly position in the social hierarchy reflects their dealings with beings who populate the lower orders of the Sinhalese cosmos. In the perceptions of the wider Sinhalese society the Beravā have come to acquire many of the characteristics of the beings



who they regularly confront. Like the demons and spirits they are wild and dirty, licentious and unsocialised, stereotypes which they are not averse to manipulating for their own ends.

But once again we are left with the problem of what the Beravā are doing at highly auspicious rituals[10] and furthermore, explaining the fact that their occupational activities go way beyond exorcism and healing. Is identity by association adequate in this respect?

#### 1.6 Dos: an occupational hazard

In an attempt to answer these questions and to provide a more comprehensive underlying structure to the various activities of the Beravā, I would like to move into the realm of the symbolic and conceptual. More particularly, I would like to examine the concept of dos which occurs in many of the ritual activities carried out by the Beravā and significantly, in many of the non-ritual activities also.

Dos, from the Sanskrit doṣa, has a variety of meanings including fault, flaw, defect, blemish or disease. As a general concept its meaning is extended beyond the idea of flaw to include the malign attentions which it will inevitably attract from agents, human and non-human. Should dos fall (dos vātenavā) upon an object or person its effects are invariably negative;

people become sick and beset with ill-luck, objects decay and become the sources of ill-luck for those in contact.

In everyday parlance, dos is used to imply criticism of a person or thing. For example, 'dos kiyanna epā', 'don't criticise' (someone or something), or literally 'don't say dos'. In such a case the imputation of dos carries more than just the weight of criticism but also introduces the possibility of misfortune for the recipient. In this context dos is often taken to be the expression of ill-feeling between two people. It is broken down into the malevolence of the stare or glance, the 'evil eye' (ās vaha), evil mouth or speech (kaṭā vaha) and evil thought (hō vaha). These feelings can be expressed intentionally as with jealousy and criticism, and ultimately given formal direction through sorcery. Alternatively, they may be directed at a person or object without malign intent, as when one gazes upon an object of great beauty or wholeness, but deep down fosters some feeling of attachment and jealousy. Thus, one must never comment on a child eating, or speak out about the beauty of a baby for fear of doing harm, however unintentional. The problem of dos falling upon a baby is solved, or rather anticipated, by painting a black dot (poṭṭu) upon the baby's forehead. The 'flawing' of the child's face with the dot is believed to absorb the malign effects of those who would gaze upon the child. One's eye is always drawn to the dot.



Malevolence can also be directed towards an object of wholeness or beauty. Ripe fruits, unless obscured from public gaze, might inexplicably spoil. Similarly, man-made objects are also liable to attract malign attention and it is not uncommon for objects to be purposely marred as a means of deflecting dos. For example, a wealthy businessman living in Mātara had had a splendid house built for himself. Around the perimeter was a high, white wall, in the centre of which was an unsightly hole, said to attract and absorb the gaze of envious onlookers. Similarly, one of my informants explained that the reason palm leaf books have holes going straight through the centre of the text was not merely to take the strings which hold the pages together but to deface the text to ensure his precious script did not attract dos!

In the supernatural context, dos falls as a result of demons, spirits and on occasion the gods, casting their gaze (bālma or diṣṭi) upon negative actions or events in the world. Possession is believed to commence at a time when the victim is alone (tanikama dosa), usually at a dangerous time or place such as midnight at a lavatory or three lane cross roads (tun man handiya). Demons afflict at such times and places by letting their gaze fall upon the victim thus exciting the three humours of the body (incidentally called the three dosa, tun dosa), causing illness and disturbance both mentally and

physically (yakṣa leḍa dosa). Other types of dos might befall a person as a result of bad planetary influences (graha dosa) and as a result of sorcery or magic (vas dos). In each of these instances the blemishes or faults and the malign attentions they attract are virtually synonymous in belief and action.

The Beravā deal with dos either directly or indirectly in virtually all their activities. Should dos fall as a result of some action or statement, they have the wherewithal to remove it, releasing the person from its negative effects. Rituals of exorcism and healing performed by the Beravā all involve the transference of dos from the patient onto neutral objects and onto themselves. The dancing which figures throughout most of the rituals performed by the Beravā is crucial in this respect. Hypnotic, costumed dances are an important device enabling the exorcists to absorb onto themselves the gaze of the audience whatever malice it might contain.

In their role as ritual drummers in a variety of contexts, the Beravā fulfill a similar role to that outlined above for dancing. Rituals mark transition from one state to another, from one time to another, from one status to another or else they enable transition to take place, as in the case of healing rituals. Drumming, whether it be routine duty at a temple on the monthly full-moon day or else that provided for twelve hours or



more at an exorcism ceremony, is an indispensable component at virtually all Sinhalese ritual. Sickness to health; life to death; old year to new year, are all marked by the sound of the drum.[11] The drum, its music and rhythm, provides a potential vehicle to the non-ordinary ritual time of the betwixt and between. That drummers should be employed at the points of potential danger and ambiguity is entirely consistent with their position in the wider society as marginal and structurally inferior. They are themselves metaphors for the liminal threat which transition, the movement between states and across boundaries, potentially holds for those most closely bound to an ordered vision of the world. When a band of drummers plays at a 'public' event, as when they play at the temple, they are not simply marking transition but providing a negative point in the highly auspicious proceedings which will attract dos. Like the spot on the baby's forehead they are the blemish, in this case at the very heart of the sacred. They absorb onto themselves and and their drums, the dos which might arise from supernatural agents or from onlookers in the course of the ritual performance.[12] In the performance of exorcism and healing ceremonies for 'private' patrons the Beravā positively attract dos onto themselves in order to control the malign forces which afflict the patient. Here, the control the Beravā have over specific repertoires and symbols and metaphors and their

manipulation and enactment in ritual performance is nowhere more positively asserted. The opposition between negative and positive roles in ritual is seen in the ragged and pathetic drummer who beats at a small village temple on the one hand, and the exorcist, in full costume, surveying his audience with contemptuous pride: an awesome sight indeed.

Up until this point we have looked solely at ritual activities of the Beravā. Staying with the concept of dos however, we can extend our analysis into the domain of non-ritual activities also. House-building, sculpture, painting, carpentry and also ritual are all, at root, practical and technical activities, following set procedures and producing ordered constructions. With the creation of order there is always the potential for the creation of disorder. Mistakes, carelessness and shoddy work will always attract negative attention: they will attract dos. Where occupation is still based on some transmissible knowledge or skill there is a desire to create, or rather re-create, according to pre-existing rules, models and patterns as imparted by a teacher. Where things are done wrong, through ignorance or intent, dos is liable to fall both on the created object and upon the creator. Two examples which illustrate this proposition in action can be seen in temple art work and house building respectively.

The sculptor of images in a temple attempts to



reproduce his craft according to the instructions of his teacher and according to rules laid out in ancient technical manuals such as the Sariputrāya (see Coomaraswamy 1908:150-163). Poor workmanship and disregard for tradition attract the negative attentions of gods, demons and human critics which may make the image unlucky and bring misfortune to its creator. Significantly, it is the job of the sculptor to bring the image to 'life' in a small ritual called the Nētra Pinkama. In this ceremony the image's creator completes its construction by painting in the eyes over his shoulder using a mirror for guidance. He is then led away blindfolded to a pot of water onto which he gazes. The pot of water is subsequently smashed. The aim of the ritual is to absorb any doṣ which might have accumulated in the construction of the image and to bring about its dangerous transfer onto neutral objects (see Gombrich 1966).

Similarly, in house construction the mason should follow the rules and prescriptions laid out in ancient building manuals such as the Mayamataya (see Coomaraswamy 1908:120-128 and Liyanaratne 1976). Failure to perform calculations and procedures (pāda bādīma) properly can mean misfortune for the craftsman and for the house and its inhabitants. Attempts to ensure against this eventuality are carried out at various stages in the process of house construction. The most explicit action

intended to absorb dos arising from the construction of a house is to be seen in the small ceremony in which the craftsman jumps across the thresholds of a partially completed house (uluvaha pānīma). At an auspicious time the craftsman recites magical formulae, casts a cock-bird, tools and finally himself across the threshold with the aim of absorbing the dos.

The responsibility to deal with dos is of course not solely restricted to the Beravā, but the range of activities in which they currently engage do associate them fundamentally with dos in its various manifestations. It is interesting to note in this respect that the Beravā are believed to be 'apirisidu' that is, impure and unclean. One of the opposites of this term is nirdosa, literally, 'without dos'.

#### Notes to Chapter 1

[1] The three examples which immediately spring to mind in this respect are those of Leach (1961) on the village of Pul Eliya, Yalman on Terutenne (1967) and Obeyesekere on the Low-Country village of Midagama (1967).

[2] A useful account of the rājakāriya system during the Kandyan period is provided by Pieris (1956: Chapters II and III).

[3] Ryan (1953:293) gives an account of the 'Battle of the Banian' a now famous incident in which there was a violent confrontation between Beravā and high caste sections of the community over their right to wear vests.

[4] For a further discussion of the meaning of food exchanges in Sinhalese society, see Yalman (1973:269-298) who contends that 'domestic arrangements like certain philosophical concepts, carry in microcosm the primary structural principles of a culture'.

[5] It is difficult to know where these patterns of styles of naming came from exactly. It is possible that it was simply a tradition linked with caste identity and certain families. However, it is interesting to note that children born in the 1950's were given more conventional Sinhalese names. This would have coincided with the first Sinhalese Nationalist government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake, under whom many of the low castes benefitted considerably.

[6] A more detailed discussion of the relationship between endogamy and classificatory kinship systems can be found in Kaplan (1973), who concludes by suggesting three analytical categories for endogamy:

i) 'group' endogamy: the obligation to marry within an objectively defined group;

ii) 'genealogical' endogamy: the obligation to choose as a spouse an individual who is related to ego in some particular way.

iii) 'alliance' endogamy (or the positive marriage rule): marriage which re-affirms a former alliance. It is the third category which is of most use in understanding the case in hand.

[7] Jiggins (1979:63-64), it must be pointed out, does give the examples of Rakwana and Balangoda districts where caste heterogeneity is high and the low caste vote may be a decisive factor in which candidate is returned.

[8] Further accounts of the role of drummers in the Kandyan Highlands can be found in Seneviratne (1978:26-37) for the Temple of the Tooth and in Evers (1972:74-97) for the temple at Lankatilaka.

[9] 'Like cruel armies of yakkhas (demons), they (the Dutch) forced their way into the town and destroyed the sacred books and everything else' (quoted from the Culavamsa in Malalgoda 1976:108). As throughout Buddhist history and mythology, religious adversaries have been conceptualised as demons. One is tempted to link the destabilisation and moral insecurity of this period, in a rather crudely Durkheimian fashion, with the growth of the demon cults in popular belief which came to florescence around that time.

[10] Evers (1972:45-46) asks a similar question with respect to low status vihāra tenants and their proximity to holy places. The answer he provides relates back to a time when slaves were brought as temple servants and workmen. He suggests that these early 'serfs' might have transmitted their low status connotations to their descendants and later migrants who worked in the temple.

[11] Needham (1967) in a thought-provoking article has



suggested the possibility that drums and percussion are a universal means of marking transition and making contact with the supernatural.

[12] Seneviratne makes a similar observation with respect to Kandyan religious processions:

'The achievement of the objectives of the ritual so meticulously designed could be jeopardised if steps were not taken to negate the possible dangers that might arise from the performance of the parahara.'

(1978:102)

The dangers he refers to are inadvertent offences to the gods and the evil eye of the onlookers. These dangers are averted by a series of special dances known as the Valiyak dance, performed before the start of the procession.

## CHAPTER 2

### CATEGORY AND COMMUNITY

#### 2.1 The Village of Beragoda

In the previous chapter, I provided an introduction to the Beravā as a social category. In the present chapter, I turn to an examination of the Beravā as community, a body of people who share the same social category, who reside together, inter-marry, work together and co-operate on a day-to-day basis. Although my eventual focus in the thesis will be on a body of ritual specialists which in fact takes us far away from the notion of community as a localised group based on residence and kinship, it is necessary to provide some general information about a particular Beravā community, the services it provides to the wider society and the individuals who provide those services.

The village of Beragoda [1] was one of several Beravā communities in the Akuressa area with which I was regularly in contact. It was the second community with

which I came into contact and came to be the one where I spent most time and had closest ties.

As my familiarity with the area and its inhabitants grew, the variety of specialists, both ritual and non-ritual, living in Beragoda came to provide for me the nucleus of a network of co-operation in work, social activities and marital alliance, which extended over several other Berava villages.

Situated about a mile from a small provincial market town on the Galle-Akuressa road, Beragoda has a population of approximately 180. The 32 dwellings which comprise the village lie scattered on a raised piece of land surrounded on almost three sides by a sea of wet-rice and on the fourth by a coconut plantation. The majority of houses lie in a narrow strip which follows the lower contours of the hillside. The houses look out over rice fields which are owned by Goyigama farmers. In the absence of an access road across the fields, disputes with Goyigama neighbours are common. The houses of the people of Beragoda are dug into the hillside and their compounds abut and overlook at different levels, making the job of traversing the village one of a series of ascents and descents interspersed by the levelled compounds.

The houses are modest in size, most having only two rooms, the largest having five. The houses range from sturdy stone and plaster constructions with tile roofs down to tiny mud and thatch dwellings in which the poorer



residents live.

On the surface, Beragoda could be taken for a typical agricultural community from any part of the South of the island. By day it rests easily under a shady canopy of jak-trees. Children play, women go about their daily tasks and men, with the exception of the old ones, are at their places of work. Below the level of appearances, however, there are a number of critical differences.

One of the most fundamental is that, with one or two exceptions, none of the residents own land other than the small garden plots upon which their houses stand. Consequently, the economic base from which the community is organised and upon which it depends for its livelihood is somewhat different from that of an agricultural community.

A second difference, closely related to the first is the existence of a thriving tradition of knowledge and skills within the community relating to occupations, caste specific and otherwise.

In the past, Beragoda had produced something of a dynasty of ritual specialists whose influence was felt throughout the Southern Province. Nowadays the village provides a wide range of services to the surrounding area and has a strong reputation for having produced many clever people (daksa minissu). People of Beragoda take pride in their village seeing it as a vehicle for ancient traditions and specialisations, paralleling it

significantly with nearby Kodagoda, itself the producer of 'clever people' such as famous monks, radio broadcasters and the like. People come from far and wide to seek out the services of the men of Beragoda, and they in turn travel all over the island providing their services.

What the services are will be the subject of a later section, how the knowledge and skills which underlie them are transmitted will be the subject of the next chapter, but in the next section I would like to give a brief account of the history and development of Beragoda.

## 2.2 The history of Beragoda

Beragoda was founded towards the end of the eighteenth century when a man named Maduraccārigē Jimisē (A1 on the genealogical diagram pp 156) along with his family migrated to the area from the coast. The impetus to settle in this particular area came about as a result of Jimisē being offered rights to a cultivable piece of land. The land was to be received in exchange for the provision of drumming services to the royal court which then existed at Mātara. A sub-section of this court lay about a mile from present day Beragoda. It was said that Jimisē received his service tenure (rājakāriya) because he drummed at the court of the king in Mātara with such force that tiles were shattered and dislodged by the noise, thus impressing the official in charge.

Jimisē served both the court and the local temple for

many years but today little remains to testify to the existence of a court sub-section in the area. Many village names still point to its existence and in some instances suggest the services they once provided, such as Porambe, which was said to be derived from pū meaning cakes and ramba meaning bananas, and was once responsible for the provision of food to the court. Likewise, the small town which exists there today has a temple of Rāja Mahā Vihāra status, that is, at some point having received royal patronage. These, however, are merely vestiges of an order long since passed.

The piece of land received under the original arrangements was said to have been six acres and consisted both of paddy lands (liyādda) and higher lands (goda). The paddy lands consisted of small plots, badly irrigated and poor quality (deniya). The higher lands upon which the first houses were built were wild and needed considerable clearing. Once brought under control, this higher land was eventually used for growing tea and cinnamon.

The plot of land upon which Jimise and his family lived and worked was known as the Divelavatta or Divelagoda, meaning garden or ground received in wages. Alternatively, the plot was known, as it still is today, as the Maduraccarigē vatta, the Garden of the Maduraccari people, after the vāsagama name of Jimisē, the first inhabitant. Today, this section of the village



is recognised as distinct.

The fate of the Maduraccārigē vatta in the early nineteenth century is far from clear. It appears from informants' statements that, following the abolition of service tenures in 1832 portions were commuted. A large proportion of the original six acres however was either taken back by Goyigama landlords, lost to Goyigama neighbours through deception or encroachment or else sold by Beravā predecessors remembered none too kindly by present generations.

Even though the Maduraccārigē vatta became divided and diminished during the nineteenth century it provided an important pull to migrants from the coast. Those who came in the footsteps of Jimisē were close kinsmen and the community developed according to kinship patterns which existed prior to the arrival of Jimisē in Beragoda. The new migrants settled on plots outside the original Maduraccārigē plot, shifting the focus of village activity onto the area which became Beragoda proper. The new settlers occupied lands surrounding the original plot and were subsequently able to claim 'squatters' rights' to these small garden plots under an arrangements implemented in the Service Tenures Ordinance of 1870. The legitimation of land rights was an important step in crystallising the development of the community by identifying caste with residence.

During the nineteenth century there emerged six key

family grouping identifiable through their vāsagama names and to a certain extent by six family houses (mula gedara) around which have grown patrilineal residential clusters closely associated with each of the vāsagama names. The six vāsagama names are as follows: Ahangama Singārakkārāgē (A.S.); Mirissa Adderavattagē (M.A., this title once contained the word nākatigē, but the family chose to leave this initial out on account of its caste connotations); Baddevatta Singārakkāra Ganitagē (B.S.G.); Uruvitiya Ganitagē (U.G., as will be revealed shortly this title came to be adopted by the original Maduraccāri people); Kurumbera Ganitagē (K.G.) and Mārāgoda Nākatigē (M.N.).

The relationships which developed between these six family groupings are illustrated in part in the genealogical diagram on page 156. The vāsagama names each indicate the village or area from which the original migrant came. For example, M.A. Disiyamē (B6), the first M.A. migrant to the village was born in the coastal town of Mirissa and came to Beragoda to marry the daughter of A.S. Panikkalē (A2), the first A.S. migrant. Disiyamē arrived in Beragoda around the middle of the nineteenth century. Likewise, most of the other established families in the village find their genesis along the coast. Close co-operation and a high degree of, inter-relatedness have ensured that close ties have persisted with coastal villages up to the present day.

The families that followed Jimise to the area brought with them new skills and activities. Jimisē and his descendants were drummers and temple musicians, davulkārayō and hēvisikārayō, engaged in the provision of services to the court and the local temple. Those who came later were exorcists (Ādurā) and astrologers (nakṣāstrakāriyō), dancers (tovilkārayō) and artists (sitare). Despite the absence of any agricultural base to fall back upon, the families who came later looked on the original settlers as low status vis a vis themselves. The grandfather of one of my informants referred to the Maduraccāri people as 'Veddahs', the aboriginal hunter-gatherers of Sri Lanka, and as 'gandakārayō', the 'bad-smelling people'. They lived in mud houses (māṭi gēval) and hunted and fished to support their meagre income from the provision of services. Even today the descendants of Jimisē, despite a change of vāsagama name, retain a lower status. The houses on the Maduraccārigē vatta are still mud and thatch and their occupants still carry out activities which, with the exception of those who have kept occupational ties with the local temple, are considered marginal within the community. In the next section I turn to an examination of the various occupations currently carried out within the village. ,



### 2.3 Present day occupations

In Beragoda today are to be found an impressive array of specialists, ritual and otherwise. Drummers, dancers, mask-makers, temple artists and exorcists live side by side with carpenters, masons and manual labourers, all brought together by the complex inter-weaving of ties of descent and alliance. The identity which affiliation to caste and kindred brings is powerfully underscored by the types of work in which the men of the community engage, and this is particularly the case where traditional occupations are involved.

As far as the numbers of men involved in traditional occupations is concerned, Beragoda is perhaps a little unusual in that over a third of the sixty or so men in the village are associated with traditional ritual activities. In most other villages in the area the number involved in such activities is much less. For example, in his survey of the Gabardavidiya ward in Mātara, Hodge (1981:32) found that out of 38 Beravā households, there were only three full-time ritual specialists; a drummer, an astrologer and an exorcist.

Within Beragoda the question of occupation and its categorisation is far from straightforward. Work may be undertaken on the basis of wage-labour or contract, on a regular or 'one off' basis, corporately or by individuals. Furthermore, it is not unusual for several skills and occupations to dovetail in a single individual to form an

integrated economic complex.

The very act of questioning men about their employment often proved difficult. Most men living in Beragoda when asked about their occupations would claim that they were unemployed; even one of the busiest exorcists in the village would frequently complain that he was 'waiting without a job' (raksāvak nātuva innavā). 'Job' is here taken to mean stable wage labour which invariably takes men out of the village for long periods to factories and labour outlets in the cities. There were about eleven men from the village engaged in such work, some of whom I never met. Those who work away from the village typically return home at New Year and times of family crisis and on such occasions gifts and financial support are expected by parents and kinsmen.

Those who remain in the village participate in the local economy and however busy they may in fact be, mostly claim to be unemployed. This is more an acknowledgement of the low social evaluation placed on many of their pursuits rather than a statement of fact. Their labour is recruited from within Beragoda and several other related communities through the activation of kin networks in response to demand (see Chapter 4). Patronage is far from stable and periods of intense activity are often interspersed with periods of forced redundancy.

A possible strategy to combat such uncertainty can be seen in the way in which diverse skills are often found in

a single individual, thus providing for some men the possibility of occupational flexibility. Such flexibility was clearly brought home on one occasion whilst I was sitting in a tea-shop with a young exorcist friend of considerable skill and renown. His uncle, a temple artist, chanced to enter the shop and after warm greetings they exchanged chat about business in their respective fields. The exorcist claimed he was fed up with tovil work which was a great trouble (mahā karadarayak) and asked if there was any work going with his uncle. There was, and my top exorcist was suddenly working as a temple artist's assistant. It later transpired that he had undergone a brief apprenticeship with his uncle in his youth.

Not all men, however, are fortunate enough to be able to lay off from one occupation and take up another when they feel like it. Varying demand for the services which the Beravā supply has always made it necessary for there to be a regular (or rather irregular) ebb and flow between different services. In many instances it would appear that the move is one way, that is, having moved out of the arena of traditional services it is very difficult to move back into it.

The movement between different types of occupation is in part in the nature of the services which the Beravā supply, which are, in the ritual sphere, on the one hand periodic and seasonal as with temple ritual, and on the



other, spontaneous and unpredictable, as with healing rituals. Although some of the more prominent specialists in the community could ensure a steady supply of work, for most, work and consequently income was erratic.

The uncertainty which surrounds work for most people is a source of freedom and mobility. A high premium is placed on the maintenance of social relationships within the community and vast amounts of time are spent visiting and socialising. Alternatively this same uncertainty is also the source of great bitterness amongst those who regularly experience it. Resentment is often expressed towards traditional activities which are seen as the source of both their lowly status and economic precariousness.

Ambivalence towards traditional occupations is expressed even by those most closely involved with them. The impression given was that such occupations would be gladly forsaken if the chance of an alternative arose. In reality, however, alternatives are few and far between. Men must necessarily fall back upon and exploit traditional occupations for all they may be lowly, menial and often stigmatised. For most Beravā engaged in traditional activities the paradox is clear: we are what we are because of what we know and what we do and this gives us our place in society, an identity and a power, however ambiguous that power might be: if we relinquish our traditions then we have no place and no power, we must

take our chances with the rest.

For one of my friends the choice had already been made. He had refused to teach his son to drum and had threatened to scold him if ever he went near his father's drum. The logic was clear: whatever else in life his son might become, he would not become a drummer.

For various reasons cited above a definitive classification of the occupations of the men of Beragoda would be difficult. However, below is given a table showing the numbers associated with certain professions in the village. These figures are based not so much on what people spend most of their time doing, but on the classification men make of one another, what profession they associate one another with, what they do best and what they are trained for. In short, rather like the caste system in general, men are pigeon-holed by occupational association, and occupation and social identity are closely inter-related.

In the table below are given the five major categories of occupational specialisation amongst the Beravā living in Beragoda:

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Table 1. Occupations carried out in Beragoda

<u>Occupations</u>	<u>Numbers associated</u>
1. Drummers ( <u>berakārayō</u> and <u>hēvisikārayō</u> )	5
2. Exorcists/dancers ( <u>ādurā</u> <u>nātumkārayō</u> , <u>mantrakārayō</u> )	11
3. Temple artists ( <u>sitare</u> and <u>citrakārayō</u> )	6
4. Masons ( <u>mēsonkārayō</u> )	12
5. Carpenters ( <u>vaḍuvē</u> )	5
6. Others - resident	10
non-resident	11
	—
Total	60

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In the following section I give a brief outline of what each of these services entail and brief character sketches of representatives of these categories of specialisation from Beragoda.

#### 2.4 Drummer and drumming

The premier drummer in Beragoda at the present is one J.P. Gomez (E9), a veritable workhorse of a man, resident in the village since his birth in 1927. For many years he



has worked with groups of performers from Beragoda and related villages in various capacities, and has earned considerable respect for his reliability and consistency as a drummer.

His father and mother moved away from Beragoda to the coastal town of Mirissa when Gomez was one year old, leaving Gomez with his mother's brother (māmā), M.N. Hinniyē (D14). Hinniyē took charge of Gomez and brought him up as an adoptive son, teaching him the skills of a drummer and providing for his general education.

At the age of ten, Gomez was an accomplished drummer performing with all the major figures in Beragoda and at the age of fifteen he displaced his māmā, Hinniyē, as the best drummer in the village.

He remained resident with Hinniyē until three years after his marriage in 1955 when he bought a small plot of land from a man who left Beragoda to seek his fortune on the coast. He built his house in 1958 and lived in a state of total disruption and upset for three years until it was discovered that the house had been built according to the incorrect prescriptions of an astrologer kinsman. The house lay on the gini katura, literally the 'fire cross', a highly inauspicious point. On the recommendation of a second astrologer he pulled the house down and rebuilt it in a slightly different orientation thus solving the problem of his domestic strife.

His house looks as if it never quite recovered from

this rebuilding, with its half dilapidated and decaying cadjan roof and uncertain mud and stick walls. Gomez shares the house, and, it is mockingly rumoured, his wife, with G.S. Pēlis (D4), a widower and lifelong friend of Gomez. The gentle menage a trois works quite effectively as Gomez is often away for days and nights working at exorcism ceremonies and the like.

Gomez's wife, rarely seen outside of the dark and smokey interior of the house, often expresses her displeasure with his lot as a drummer. She points out that as a drummer there can be no development as he always gets the smallest slice when it comes to payment, often as little as ten rupees for a nights work. Although on one occasion recently Gomez did earn 50 rupees (about £1.50 in 1979) his wife resents deeply his involvement in activities which are so demanding yet offer such a meagre and precarious income. This latter attitude may explain the reason why both Gomez's sons, now grown up and married, were trained as dancers in Beragoda, but were eventually persuaded to give up this vocation by their mother. Both returned to the mother's natal home in Mātara where one became a taxi driver and the other a seller of betel leaves.

For Gomez, now well into his fifties, the signs of over forty years of beating a drum are beginning to tell. His hands are stunted and calloused from the endless hours of pounding the leather. His legs, disproportionately

thin against his broad back and chest, are painful from rheumatism caused by hours of standing and beating and hours of sitting cross-legged on the floor in order to beat. He still, however, continues in his labour. Lately, he has begun to carry out small works of healing using mantra (ġdurukam vaḍa) a source of income far less physically demanding than that of drumming.

So what are the services of the drummer that are at once so essential at virtually all Sinhalese rituals yet so poorly recognised and remunerated? Following the convention outlined in Chapter 1, we can divide the activities into the public and the private spheres.

#### 2.4.1. Public ceremonial drumming

In the public sphere drumming is an essential requisite at most Buddhist ritual. Under this heading is included the performance of drumming as an offering in its own right (śabda pūjāva), as when drummers accompany worshippers making their offerings on full-moon (poya) days. On such occasions the services of hēvisikārayō are required, a small band of musicians who play the various drums and wind instruments at the temple. The instruments they play are referred to as the 'Five Musical Forms' (panca tūriya nādiya). In the South these five instruments are taken to be the two-eyed drum (dekḷḷa beraya) otherwise known as the devil-drum or yak beraya, a long cylindrical drum played with both hands;



the davul beraya, a short cylindrical drum played with one hand and a stick held in the other; the tammāṭṭama, a peculiar instrument consisting of two separate drums tied side by side and beaten with two curled sticks; the horanḥva, a shrill wind instrument and finally, the kai talam or gana, a pair of brass cymbals used to beat time.[2] These instruments, with the exception of the cymbals, are all constructed and maintained by members of the caste (Gomez recalled how, as a child, Hinniyē [D14] had constructed a miniature davul beraya for him). They are believed to have been played when Buddha attained enlightenment and are consequently required at any auspicious celebration (magul davasa). In keeping with this idea and the ideas about dos developed in Chapter 1, drummers may also be requested to perform at weddings and public celebrations such as openings and investitures.

Hēvisi musicians accompany the making of offerings in temples to both Buddha and the gods (pūjā, pinkama and dēva pūjā), the chanting of scriptures (pirit) and their music is further required when relics and sacred objects (dhātu) are taken in procession out of the temple (pārahāra).

Along with several of his kinsmen, Gomez has regularly participated as a drummer in the provision of these services to local temples. At one time these services were organised as a formal service tenure system

as described in Chapter 1, Section 4. Nowadays, however, this aspect of the drummer's work is organised through increasingly informal networks of patronage. Another of Beragoda's drummers, a temple drummer for most of his life, had been responsible in his earlier years for the organisation of temple services to several local temples, which, on poya days meant he was responsible for up to fifteen drummers. He now laments the passing of this era claiming that temple lay committees (dāyaka sabhā) were against expenditure on drummers. He had personally made drums at the behest of local priests who then instructed people, often children, to play them 'by ear'. Such actions, complained the drummer, not only led to a loss of business but also heralded the demise of the drumming tradition. Certain rhythms (pada) for example have already been lost.

The services of the hēvisi musician are also required to lead a funeral procession on its journey to the cremation ground. The instruments used on this occasion are the same as the ones used in the temple, except that the yak bera and cymbals are absent and the tammāṭṭama is wrapped in a white cloth, thus muffling the sound to maintain solemnity.

As might be expected, given the highly polluting nature (killa) of the corpse, this activity is not popular amongst drummers and is considered one of the lowest in which they might engage. One informant

sidestepped the question of their role as funerary drummers by saying that their drumming on such occasions is provided solely as a mark of respect for the priesthood (ganga) who should be represented in the funeral procession.

Finally, public drumming services are called upon in rituals dedicated to the gods. There are numerous categories of these rituals, mostly performed on behalf of a whole village. These rituals include the Gam Maḍuva, Vāhalla, Devol Bāge, Devol Maḍuva etc. all of which are intended to protect the community from famine and pestilence by appeal to the gods and particularly the goddess Pattini.

These rituals are presided over and organised by a category of specialists known as kapurāla who are drawn from the higher castes and are responsible for dealings with the gods. In organising their rituals the Kapu Mahattayā or Pattini Mahattayā, as they are called, request the services of drummers whose responsibility it becomes to provide a group of drummers to meet the organiser's requirements. In such rituals the role of the Beravā is confined solely to drumming although they do on occasion provide dancers to augment the scale of the performance. At no time, however, do they participate directly in the propitiation of the gods.

In some areas, drummers have long-standing relationships with particular kapurāla, with ties



extending back over generations. Gomez 'inherited' such associations from Hinniye but never particularly excelled in that field. Like so many aspects of the communities' skills and traditions the impression given is one of demise. Drumming at village rituals is a specialised field in itself with those able to provide such services getting fewer and fewer, as are the rituals in which such specialisation can be exercised. Those who can play the rhythms of the gods (deviyaṇṭa gahanna pada) are becoming as few as those kapurāla who know the context of their application.

The payment received for services rendered at such rituals takes the form of a cut taken out of the organisers' overall fee which is shared according to rank between all the participants. A fee of ten or fifteen rupees can be expected for an ordinary village ceremony but for major occasions such as the Dondra pārahāra and the rituals which follow, two or three times this amount can be earned.

Whilst there are drummers who have managed to maintain a degree of stability in fixed relationships with a certain temple or patron in return for payment and perks, most drummers are recruited in response to the requirements of particular occasions, the larger the event the more kinsmen likely to be recruited. A good illustration of this point can be seen in the major religious processions (pārahāra) held in Colombo and

Kandy by the big temples. These festivals often recruit drummers from all over the island. In the South this recruitment was co-ordinated by a man from Galle who was said to be responsible for the organisation of up to two hundred of his kinsmen from the surrounding area. On these occasions, most of my main informants would provide their services, whilst others not generally involved in such activities, would beg, steal or borrow drums in order to participate.

#### 2.4.11. Private ritual drumming

Turning now to the private sphere of services connected with drumming we move into the realm of exorcism and healing in which the services of the drummer are indispensable. The drummer who provides his services in the contexts outlined above is quite likely to be one and the same person as the drummer (berakārayā) at an exorcism ceremony. Gomez for example, regularly works in the drummer's roles given above should they arise but his main source of income is derived from the performance of exorcism with other kinsmen from the village. His role on these occasions is to provide the thunderous accompaniment which continues almost throughout the entire night's performance.

In such ceremonies the only instrument used is the powerful yak beraya, the demon drum, peculiar to the South. Throughout the ritual it is the job of between one



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and four drummers to provide the rhythms for the dancers. Each ritual is characterised by its own particular rhythms and it is often the role of the drummer to direct, through his mastery of rhythm, the development of the whole performance, which may take from twelve to eighteen hours to complete. The drummers bring in the changes in rhythm and beat which signal the shifts between the different phases of the rituals.

In certain kinds of ritual it is the role of the drummer to engage in comic dialogue with masked actors, as for example in the Dahā ata sanniya episode (see Appendix II). In these episodes, the drummer plays the role of 'straight man', addressed reverently and somewhat mockingly as 'gurunnānse' or 'teacher' by the 'fall guy' who is usually a dancer in the guise of a crazed demon. It is in their role as 'gurunnānse' that many drummers develop reputations for their wit and audacity and as general entertainers.[3] No doubt the hardship and deprivations many drummers have to endure as part and parcel of their role serves to hone their perceptions and their humour to a fine edge.

## 2.5 Exorcists and exorcism

Under this heading are to be included the wide range of activities which are practised by the Beravā alone without the co-operation of specialists from other castes.[4] The ritual services of exorcism and healing,



generally referred to as tovil in the South, are supplied to individual patrons wherever the need should arise. The performances which comprise this category draw upon knowledge, skills and techniques developed over many generations within the caste. The rituals act primarily on the agents of malevolence and disorder who populate the lower orders of the Sinhalese cosmos: the demons (yakṣa), spirits (prētayō) and devils (kumbhānda). The rituals are intended to rid individuals of the effects of these beings, effects which manifest themselves in illness and misfortune. The strategies adopted by the exorcist to deal with these dangerous supernatural intrusions are as various as the agents of misfortune they seek to combat.

Our representative of this category is M.A. Leeson (E11) born in Beragoda in 1945 and today one of the most successful exorcists in the village. He is a short and exceedingly scrawny man with shoulder length hair and crumpled teeth. Like each of his brothers, he has a tattoo of a tiger's head on his right shoulder. In character he exhibits many of the qualities of confidence and cunning which might be expected from a lifetime of living cheek by jowl with a society's standardised nightmares. As if in recognition of the worlds which he must bring together in himself during performances he has an image of Suniyam on his wall. Suniyam is a deity who spends half the month as a god and the other half as a

demon and perpetrator of sorcery. Leeson always worships Suniyam before he goes to work.

Leeson's family has for many generations been steeped in the traditions of exorcism. He began attending exorcisms with his father when he was seven years old, helping out and preparing offering trays and decorations.

His enthusiastic attendance at exorcisms with his father, he hastened to add, had little to do with the rituals as such, but rather the certainty of a good rice meal laid on by the household for whom the ritual was to be performed.

His attendance at the local school was erratic, not only because of his attendance at all night ceremonies, but also because of his truancy. He recalled how he would set off for school and arrive at the local bicycle repair workshop where he would spend the day pumping up tyres for a wage of five cents. With his five cents he would buy bidis to smoke and a couple of Bombay onions to eat on the way home to take the smell of the tobacco away.

Leeson's relationship with his father was very troubled and reached a critical point when Leeson was caught stealing from a house in which they were performing a ceremony. After this Leeson was cast off by his father and sent to K.G. Wiltin (D2) as an apprentice.

Wiltin lived on the outskirts of the village and was by all accounts a wild and frightening character in his earlier days. He was a drinker and fighter whose excesses

eventually lead to him being ostracised from the village. Despite Wiltin's violent outbursts upon Leeson during his apprenticeship, he claims he learned a great deal from him and came to respect him as a teacher.

When I eventually met Wiltin I found a mellowed but outspoken old man, embittered by the treatment he had received from his kinsmen in Beragoda. He was particularly critical of Leeson whom he claimed nobody else had been able to do anything with, referring to him as a person who could not be 'made' or educated (hadanna bāri ekkenā). It was Wiltin who had made him into a first class exorcist, a fact which in Wiltin's view he now seemed to have forgotten.

Leeson was expelled from school at the age of thirteen for stealing the teacher's wages from her handbag and from that time on became a full-time performer with Wiltin. His skill as an exorcist eventually led to him taking over from his father whose health began to fail.

Although a respected exorcist both within and without the Beravā community, Leeson still maintains close ties with many of the less desirable characters from the local town such as Indian Bandu, the smuggler, the one-legged bicycle repair man with the withered arm and all the illicit alcohol sellers. He is still very much the artful dodger both charming and audacious, invariably one step ahead of those whom he meets.

In 1971 following the insurgency, which incidentally



posed a serious threat to the livelihood of many performers because tovil were classed as illegal gatherings. Leeson went to Colombo. He had been offered a room in Kollupitiya by the boss of one of his relations who worked in Colombo as a carpenter. Leeson established himself in business as a one-man consultancy offering advice and treatment on a wide range of magical and supernatural conditions. In his newspaper advertisement and on his business cards, Leeson styled himself a 'famous exorcist [ädurā] from the Southern Province' capable of healing by exorcism, healing by charms and magical diagrams (mantra and yantra), constructing and reading horoscopes, making protective charms and talismans etc. He says he worked extremely hard but could barely make ends meet once his rent had been paid. After three years he gave up and returned to Beragoda where he built himself a house with the money he was able to save from his work in the city.

His house is small with just one room. It is neat and well-built from brick and tile. It lies below the family house (mula gedera), known to all in the village as the Mirissa Gedera after the village from which the original migrant to the area came. Leeson sleeps at this house but eats with his parents still and also plays a major role in the running of the family house.

Towards the end of my stay Leeson was married. It was an arranged marriage to a distant cross-cousin. The

couple took up residence in Leeson's house and built a cadjan, lean-to kitchen on the side. In a recent letter he informed me that his wife had given birth to a baby girl.

Leeson's example is fairly typical of many exorcists operating in the South today. Where it is atypical is in the fact that Leeson is now moderately successful whereas the majority are destined to play secondary roles with all the social and material impediments which that implies. Secondly, Leeson's period in Colombo undoubtedly served to enhance his reputation and respect in the community. This access to broader experience is one which few performers engaged in the more mundane performance of exorcism ever achieve. (Another interesting exception is a famous Southern dancer and exorcist named Polwatte Gomez who some years ago was selected to go on a cultural tour of Germany. Since then, everybody in the community knows him, almost everybody claims to be related to him and at family occasions he is treated with nothing short of divine reverence.) At a comparatively early age Leeson is now consolidating his position as an organiser of tovil and withdrawing from the more strenuous aspects of this work, such as the dancing and the more lengthy recitations. These are left to less senior performers whilst he takes responsibility for the more esoteric recitations and the more critical phases of the ritual.

More will be said on these aspects of the exorcist's work in later chapters.

Within the broad category of exorcist or 'peoples' priest' as Wirz (1954:14) quaintly calls him, are to be found a wide range of skills and specialist activities which, when put together in combination, make possible a spectacular repertoire of ritual types and forms. Those participating in the performance of exorcism and healing ceremonies not only have extensive knowledge of the language and lore of demons and spirits expressed in poems, chants and magical formulae but also command of numerous purely technical skills.

All Ādurā undertake some training in the art of dancing (nāṭum) and attain varying degrees of virtuosity. Dancing forms a critical component of all major healing ceremonies in which the carefully patterned movements of the dancers, co-ordinated with the rhythms of the drum, are believed to have a magical potency.

Other skills which must be mentioned as part of the Ādurā's stock in trade include the ability to carve masks (ves muhunu kāpīma) which dancers wear as they act and mime the manifestations of the beings they seek to propitiate. This particular skill, dealt with in more detail in a later chapter, is becoming of increasing importance in its own right as masks are produced in bulk for sale to tourists.

Most exorcists are also able to sculpt and paint the



impressive semi-relief images in clay (bali ambanavā) which form a focus in the propitiation of certain demons.

An ādurā is responsible for his own costumes, head-dresses and ornaments, their maintenance and construction. A dancer's costumes and masks are often amongst his most prized possessions. Leeson, for example, had costumes made by himself and his mother and also some splendid items passed onto him by his teacher.

Finally, an ādurā will be skilled in the totally ephemeral art of sculpting in strips of young coconut leaves (gok-kola kalāva). Facility in this little recognised art enables the ādurā to decorate the ritual arena and to make the various offering trays and receptacles by means of which the demons receive their oblations. Those who possess this skill also occasionally earn a few rupees from decorating wedding alters (poruva), spirit pavilions (mandapa) and the like.

Before leaving this section, I would like to mention some of the more negative aspects of the exorcist's art. As a logical complement of the exorcist's skill in relieving the suffering caused by demons and spirits, his knowledge can also be employed in recruiting such forces to cause misfortune. Ability to cut sorcery (kodivina kṣpīma) is matched by the capacity to do sorcery (kodivina karanavā). Charms recited over crabs claws, wax images impaled with thorns, compounds made from the

tears of cats and dogs, and poisonous vines and creepers placed in the path of unsuspecting victims are all believed to cause injury and suffering, usually in the interests of redress and revenge.

Leeson, like many others I spoke with, was fully aware of the potential for their skills to be used for 'black' and nefarious purposes but expressed strong disapproval of those who did carry out such acts. This was very much the public line, which did not necessarily coincide with what went on in private. From the views put across by many of my informants it appeared that fear and superstition on the part of the Beravā's public was a strong factor in the continued participation, actual or imagined, in this particular field of activity. Without doubt, more than a few rupees had been earned by Ḥdurā approached with clandestine requests to carry out sorcery and the like from customers in need of hocus-pocus.

## 2.6 Astrology

As indicated in Chapter 1, astrology is a profession long associated with the Beravā caste. There are no full-time astrologers practising in Beragoda but it is necessary to mention it because several men (and one woman) are skilled astrologers and use it on occasion to derive supplementary income. It is of further importance as a vital factor in the diagnosis and prognosis of certain kinds of illness in which planetary influences.

auspicious times and the person's horoscope must all be taken into consideration if the result is to be successful. This aspect of the work of the Beravā is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

## 2.7 Temple art and artists

Temple art work is not, to my knowledge, a traditional caste occupation and would appear to have been appropriated by certain members of the caste towards the end of the nineteenth century. The caste traditionally associated with the construction and decoration of Buddhist temples was the Navandannō, or rather a subcaste called the Sittaru, comprising painters and sculptors. The Navandannō in the South of Sri Lanka appear to have remained with their other traditional crafts as blacksmiths and jewellers, moving more latterly into motor mechanics and the motor trade. Their association with temple construction and decoration, however, is nowadays taken over by the Beravā who are not only coming to dominate this field in Sri Lanka but are also exporting their talents as far afield as India and Korea.

One of the key factors in the successful expansion of the Beravā into this niche relates to the efforts of one man, Maligāva Singārakkārāgē Sarlis, a temple artist from the coastal town of Galle. The great grandson of a drummer who migrated from the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy during the eighteenth century, Sarlis Master, as he came



to be known, played a seminal role in the development of temple art during the Buddhist revival around the turn of the century. His work led to the emergence of a distinctly modernist style of temple decoration characteristic of Buddhist temples in the South today.

Even though my own evidence would suggest that ties with the occupation of temple artist go back further than Sarlis, he was undoubtedly the first to gain recognition for the Beravā in this field. He established a tradition of temple art work amongst his kinsmen to such an extent that most of the temple artists with whom I worked claimed some relationship, either directly or indirectly, with Sarlis Master.

A further reason for the growth of this occupation amongst the Beravā, I would suggest, relates to its compatibility with other more traditional activities. The proximity of many Beravā men to temple affairs, in their role as drummers and general caretakers, would have placed them in an ideal position to monopolise on the cultural renaissance of the late nineteenth century.

The picking up of a thread long since severed for the Navandannō was not, however, simply an act of opportunism. Their entry into this field was also backed by skills and techniques traditionally possessed by the Beravā. Apart from the general skills of carpentry and masonry, the Beravā had long been the makers of painted images in clay (bali rupaya) used in a variety of healing rituals. The

skills and techniques associated with the production of bali images was readily transposed into the context of Buddhist imagery. The techniques involved in the production of both types of imagery display many interesting parallels, such as the overlaying of materials of different consistencies, clay for bali images and cement for temple images, in the build up to a solid and smooth image. The images of Buddha and the gods which are produced by this technique give the impression of finely sculpted stone and are of exceptionally high standard.

Unfortunately, the skill of the Beravā as sculptors is not often matched by their skill as temple painters, as can be seen from some of their more recent efforts at painting Jātaka murals, the friezes depicting scenes from the life of Buddha which decorate nearly all temples.

Their skill as sculptors is, however, finding increasing expression in the more recent trend towards decorating temples with three-dimensional tableaux of the Jātaka stories rather than the traditional wall murals.

At the present time, Beragoda has at least three temple artists who have reached positions of substantial recognition and respect in their craft. Two still operate from Beragoda and the third struck out from the village in 1966 claiming that the location and the people of Beragoda were impeding his development. His stand, independent of his caste and his community, proved to be remarkably successful. He runs a school for teaching dancing and

drumming to school children for purposes of cultural displays, he has contracts for the renovation of temples which are in the order of 22,000 Rs. (around £7,000 in 1979) and his crowning glory was to read an invocation (yātikāva) to the President and Prime Minister at the 1978 Vap Magul ceremony at Tissamaharama.

The two other well-established temple artists of Beragoda had not reached such heights but were nevertheless enjoying a continuing supply of work. A sure sign of this was the great difficulty I had in getting to meet them as they were often away for weeks on end working on sites all over the island.

One of the artists or bās as he is respectfully called is B.S.G. Arnolis (E5), born in Beragoda in 1937 and a member of a family traditionally associated with arts and crafts. He is a gentle and unassuming character with -a ramrod- straight back and shoulders pinned well back; not unlike many of the Buddha images which he so ably creates. He claims his success is due to a special power (gupta) which comes from his devotion and attention to his teacher on the one hand and his close observance of Buddhist principles on the other. This power manifests itself in his works which he claims are pleasing and satisfying to those who experience them.

His first involvement with sculpting was through the art of making bali images with his grandfather, father and brother who were all Bali ādurā. Even though he



found bali tovil work troublesome, this is what he would have gone on to do were it not for the fact that his mother became ill and he, being the last at home (his four sisters were already married), spent much time looking after her. As a result of this he never continued with the actual performance of Bali tovil but was an able sculptor. This skill was developed in the direction of temple art work when, at the age of thirteen, he was sent to his uncle (māmā) to study. He was apprenticed to, and later worked with, his teacher for fifteen years until he began work on his own.

To date Arnolis claims to have worked in over 105 different temples throughout Sri Lanka. At the time of my stay he had no less than five major contracts in different degrees of completion, thus ensuring a continuous supply of work and infuriating patrons who may have to wait a couple of years for the completion of a job. The extent and quality of Arnolis' work has given him a good reputation. People see his work and offer him new contracts and so his business spreads. His most recent success was a 24 foot Buddha statue built at the Ja-Ela rest-house north of Colombo.

Arnoles lives in a substantial brick and tile house close by the traditional family home. The house has two large rooms but despite its impressive exterior the house is spartan with barely a stick of furniture inside, bringing to mind the Sinhalese saying that 'in the house

of the carpenter there is not a chair' (vaḍuve gedara putuvak nḥ).

Whilst Arnolis' growing economic success is still not as yet translated into manifestly material expressions, it is reflected in his two children who were always clean and smartly dressed and well kitted out for school: no doubt representing for Arnolis a more secure form of future investment.

## 2.8 Masons and building work

In the area where I worked, one of the commonest occupational categories was the mason (there are twelve full-time masons in Beragoda). As something of a catchall, the term mēsonkārayā is used to cover a wide range of skills and techniques ranging from those of the skilled artisan (bās unḥḥ) down to unskilled labourers (vāḍakārayō). Works undertaken by masons range from simple house repair jobs, the construction of tiles and roofs and on occasion taking on major projects such as the building of a house.

The reason that this particular occupation is given as the most common reply to the question 'what work do you do?' (vāḍa monavada karannē) relates, on the one hand to its caste anonymity, and on the other to its importance as a secondary occupation for men to fall back on should their primary occupation become jeopardised for some reason.

Its importance in this latter respect is in part due to the overlap which building works have for the Beravā with certain other of their occupations. For example, temple art work, apart from the final stages in the construction of images, stupas etc. is largely a question of very basic building skills. The maintenance and construction of stupas (dāgāba); decorative walls and boundaries (simāva); temple buildings such as the preaching hall (bana māduva), priest's meeting house (poya gē), their residences (pansal) and even such basic necessities as kitchens and toilets etc. are all carried out in the basic medium of sand, lime, cement and brick. Even the decoration of temples and the construction of images employ these basic materials, often with impressive versatility. A temple artist, if he does not possess such skills himself, needs the services of ordinary masons and these are often recruited from amongst kinsmen.

Masonry work, in both the religious and domestic contexts, is furthermore connected to another important area of interest within the caste and that is astrology. Many masons claim to have a knowledge of, or at least a familiarity with, that branch of astrology which deals with the auspicious design, location and construction of houses known as Pāda Bādīma or 'The Division of the Paths'. This particular branch of astrology seems to be little known or little used in other parts of the island



but is still quite a common consideration when it comes to housebuilding in the South. I even knew of several cases where a failure to follow the prescriptions of pāda bādīma initially had resulted in people later pulling down their houses in order to build them in a slightly different position or orientation.

Our representative of this category is M.A. Simon (E10), the elder brother of M.A. Leeson. Simon was born in Beragoda in 1934 and currently works around the vicinity of the village with his youngest brother. Together they take on a variety of small contracts working for between 10 and 20 Rs. a day.

Simon should have learned the craft of exorcism from his father, but, on his own admission, he never had the brains for it. Today he happily acknowledges a role second to his younger brother Leeson (E11) described above.

Even in following an apprenticeship in house repair work with one of his uncles, Simon claims he was unable to achieve the status of a craftsman, signified by the title bās unāhā or 'venerable artisan'. This lack of achievement was invariably turned to advantage in Simon's projection of himself as a simple artisan, happy in his labour, content with his lot and desirous that things should stay that way.

Simon's house stands adjacent to the family house forming another element in the Mirissa Adderavattage

patrilineal cluster. He lives with his wife and two children.

## 2.9 Carpenters and carpentry

Although once the preserve of a particular sub-caste of the Navandannō called the Vaduvē, carpentry and wood-working is nowadays practised by people of all castes. For the Beravā it provides an important subsidiary skill complementing other building skills and practised as a specialist occupation in its own right. Like all the other skills discussed, carpentry involves a teacher, an apprenticeship and the ascent through various stages of ability. The appellation Vaduvē is given to those who have achieved recognition and acceptance as able carpenters.

A.S. Tedaris (E6) is acknowledged to be the finest out of Beragoda's five professional carpenters. He was born in the village in 1920 and, after an abortive career as a dancer (see page 161) he embarked on an apprenticeship at the age of 19. By the age of 24 he had completed his apprenticeship and went on to spend a good many years working as a carpenter in Piliyandala, a suburb of Colombo. He recalled with certain incredulity that his wage was 75 cents a day (approximately 2 pence in 1979).

Nowadays he works with one of his sons, a relationship which he claims works very well. Working from Beragoda they engage in the construction of door-posts, windows,

tables, beds etc.

Despite his recognition as a carpenter, Tedaris is manifestly poor. His clothes are always worn and faded and his home is a tiny one roomed mud and cadjan hut. It is difficult to imagine how he and his wife brought up seven children in the house but, perhaps, not so difficult to imagine why two of them died.

Tedaris' children have now all grown up and one son, a carpenter remains in the natal home, the other four, three sons and a daughter all live and work elsewhere.

My over-riding recollection of Tedaris was of a man who never ever smiled, a direct consequence no doubt of a lifetime of relentless toil and personal hardship.

#### 2.10 Other occupations

Finally, under the rather vague heading of 'other occupations' are to be included the wide range of activities other than those referred to above. It is quite possible that all men in the village have at some time engaged in 'other' occupations, to fill in between periods of plentiful work or else in response to requests for assistance from kinsmen. However, in this category I refer primarily to those men who do not participate in traditional occupations but who derive their well-being from non-caste specific occupations, which may be of a skilled nature but are for the most part unskilled and manual. Amongst these occupations can be included



labouring for government agencies, such as councils and irrigation schemes, pavement vending of cheap goods such as sweets and trinkets, and home based manufacture of small items such as native cheroots (bidi) and coconut spoons (pol handiya) etc. When not engaged in such occupations workers in this category add to the growing numbers of unemployed in towns and villages. This problem is only partially solved by the drift to the bigger cities of young men seeking employment as waiters and kitchen staff in hotels and rest-houses. Suffice it to say that as the possibilities for earning a living in the traditional arena become narrowed down, the number of men seeking wage labour in diverse non-traditional occupations grows.

### 2.11 Conclusion

The first two chapters have provided a general introduction to the Beravā caste. More particularly I have examined the Beravā from the perspective of their classificatory perception as a social category by the rest of Sinhalese society and some of the social and historical underpinnings of this perception. I have also provided a general description of the Beravā as a community, oriented by its history, dense networks of kinship which tie the community together and thirdly by the work which members of the community carry out.

But as well as providing a general introduction, the

first two chapters serve to contextualise the more specific areas of investigation with which the remainder of the thesis will be taken up. In subsequent chapters the focus narrows down considerably onto those within the caste who, in the first place, have transmissible skills but more particularly those who operate in the traditional, ritual sphere. As was indicated in Chapter 1, ritual specialists are a minority within the caste, but nevertheless they are a crucial minority; for it is in the sphere of ritual performance that the clearest and least ambiguous nexus between caste and occupational activity can be seen. Every time a Beravā man beats a drum, or a group don their costumes and masks in an exorcism, or recite their secret formulae to cure the afflicted, an explicit statement is made about caste and the occupational identity of the Beravā. Even though the majority of the caste are in no way connected with these activities, it is the performance and persistence of ritual services which accounts for the wider classificatory perception of the Beravā as a social category. Inevitably, there is considerable ambiguity for those of the Beravā caste who now operate outside the traditional arena when it come to inter-caste behaviour, but it is my contention that the traditional ritual specialists and the services they provide are a generative source or core of caste identity and identification. Crucial in understanding the interplay or negotiation of

caste identity and identification is the concept of Tradition: its nature, the mechanisms by which it is transmitted, and the uses to which it is put; it is to this question that I now turn.

### Notes to Chapter 2

[1] The name Beragoda is a pseudonym for the village in which I actually worked. My informants referred to it as a village (gama) and it conforms to Obeyesekere's notion of a gama, that is, 'an estate owned originally by a founding ancestor' (1967:13).

[2] A more complete account of Sinhalese musical instruments is given in Raghavan (1967: 170-184).

[3] This aspect of the drummers' role has been examined in a most interesting fashion by Kapferer in a series of articles which, amongst other things, look at the therapeutic role of humour and comedy (1975:32-38; 1977:105-110 and forthcoming publication).

[4] Whilst the Beravā do exercise something of a monopoly in this field, it is by no means complete. Other low castes such as the Oli or Potter caste, and in some instances high caste men, also participate in this field.





Plate III. A nine year old boy takes the floor in a Suniyam ceremony. His father watches on from behind.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE TRANSMISSION OF "traditions"

'tubu tñnaka sora saturan gata nohenā,  
e sñnda māna vat vaturen vala no yanā  
kopavuvat rāja mātindun gata nohenā  
ugata manā silpaya mayi matu rākenā

Only learning that has been carefully  
acquired remains throughout ones life.  
In no place can one be deprived of it by  
thieves or enemies,

it will not be washed away by water,  
nor can kings or rulers confiscate it.

(extract from the 'Vadan Kavi Pota' in  
Godakumbure 1955:215)[1]

#### 3.1 Tradition and "traditions"

From an external perspective, the Beravā are identified with certain types of knowledge and action, passed down as Tradition within the caste. Tradition in this sense provides the Beravā with a crucial social nexus with the rest of society; they are called upon to provide certain specialist services and in return receive payment of some kind. To a large extent Tradition lies outside the control of the Beravā as the identification of the

Beravā with a Tradition is underpinned by caste and perceptions imposed from other sections of Sinhalese society.

From an internal perspective, however, it makes no sense to talk of Beravā Tradition. Although given an apparent coherence imposed from the outside, Beravā Tradition turns out to be a series of highly specialised fragments which are better described as traditions, with particular Beravā controlling different aspects of the overall Tradition.

Such traditions are embedded in families and individuals who identify with, and are identified through the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Contrary to the external evaluation of such skills as inferior, within the caste they are a source of great pride and kudos. Differentials in knowledge and skill are an important source of social differentiation and often a means to social relationships within the caste. For example, traditions can be seen as resources over which conflicts of access can arise, or alternatively, can provide the impetus for marital alliance in order to gain access to additional knowledge and skills.

In short, these traditions operate, and are operated, as dynamic entities for those within the Beravā caste who have some transmissible knowledge or skill. Beravā traditions, as we shall see, are intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life figuring prominently in



economic and political relationships often expressed in the idiom of kinship within the community.

These points will be more fully illustrated in the course of the present chapter in which more detailed attention is paid to the internal perspective, that is, traditions as they are continually transformed and differentiated, as a means to identity, a means to livelihood or a component of status, within the community. A complex division of labour arising from the need to bring together certain types of knowledge and expertise in the production of artefacts and the performance of various rituals, an extensive differentiation of the types of knowledge and skill and finally competition and exchange in traditional knowledge and skills all gravitate away from the reified notion of Tradition, as identified from the outside, with caste or even community.

### 3.2 Tradition and knowledge

It is perhaps now appropriate to turn to a more detailed investigation of some of the concepts to be used throughout the chapter; to make explicit some of the assumptions implicit in the introduction.

The notions of Tradition and the Traditional are concepts used with great frequency in the study of society and culture. They often mean different things to different people and different things to the same people at different times. They are encompassing concepts which

enable us to take for granted a number of factors about certain societies, systems and beliefs, and as such form part of the lingua franca of the social sciences.

The notion of Tradition invokes primarily the idea of a chain of transmission of some kind. The past is connected with the present and 'pastness', as Shils (1971:129) calls this connection, is the source of authority, legitimacy and power in the present. Patterns of ideas, beliefs and actions are reproduced and recur through time in a form ideally unchanging. This is achieved through various 'mechanisms of persistence' (ibid) which generate a consensus on the value of the past and the necessity of its continual re-incarnation in the present. The past, often embellished with sacred and transcendent properties, and its relationship of continuity with the present adds a critical temporal dimension to the nature of community in the present.

However, having given a general idea of the ground over which the concept of Tradition can be stretched I would like to turn to two distinct usages of the term Tradition. Shanklin (1981) outlines two meanings and uses of the term Tradition; the passive theoretical construct and the active, indigenous view of Tradition.

Traditional in the former sense is often used to designate whole societies which change relatively slowly and tend to legitimate contemporary action by reference to, and reproduction of, models and patterns passed on

from a time before the present. Tradition here is treated as a static entity, a force of reaction against its opposite modernity.

Following a respectable pedigree from both Marx and Weber the opposition between Tradition and modernity found considerable efflorescence in the 1960's in the Chicago School, notably in the work of Redfield and Marriot (1960 and 1955 respectively), and furthermore became an important component in theories of social change and modernisation thereafter.

Tradition was used as an analytical concept denoting two interacting levels within society, the great and little Traditions. The 'great' and the 'little' express the oppositions: high culture/low culture, urban/folk, textual/popular, civilisation/village etc. (cf. Tambiah 1970:369 for critique of this approach) rather than the continuities and transformations between these levels. This approach reinforced the view of Tradition as an inhibiting force to development and modernisation, a set of emotional and irrational responses to external influences.

So, in this first usage, we are referring to folk or peasant societies and their beliefs in general. These beliefs are:



'...beliefs in the virtue of authority, of respect for age and the rightful allocation of the highest authority to the aged... beliefs in the value of the lineage and the kinship group and in the primacy of obligations set by members in these groups. Traditional beliefs are deferential... express an attitude of piety not only towards earthly authorities, towards the elders and ancestors but also to the invisible powers which control earthly life... The traditional attitude is a god-fearing attitude.'

(Shils 1971:137)

As a component of the rural peasant landscape of Sinhalese society, the Beravā are clearly Traditional and indeed considerable mileage could be got from an understanding of their role as exponents of the 'little' Tradition within the 'great' Tradition of Buddhism. However, my interest lies not so much in the concept of Tradition as a rather ethereal notion of time honoured and respected beliefs but as an active principle in the social and economic organisation of certain groups within the Beravā caste. We cease to talk of Tradition and begin to talk of traditions or a tradition of... The metaphors we employ shift from the idea of a receptacle and containment to the idea of traditions flowing through the society. At this point we move onto the second usage of the notion of tradition: the active.

Tradition in this sense is used as a device not only for orientation to the past, but also for orientation to the present and the future. Rather in the 'history is the myth which justifies the present' vein, traditions are modified and manipulated as much to

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challenge internal solidarity as to promote it.[2] These traditions are more firmly located in day to day social interaction.

However, I would like to go further than this in locating traditions in the social sphere and effect a further reduction of the use of Tradition as a macro-sociological concept by looking at the nature of traditions amongst the Beravā. This will take us to the opposite extreme from views of Tradition as static and transcendent, to the view of traditions as active and immanent in the present, bringing us close to Williams' view of tradition as the handing down of beliefs between a father and son, requiring as little as two generations to become a tradition (1976:268-269). Emphasis on the content of traditions, the mechanisms of their transmission and the principles of their persistence takes us away from the study of Tradition as such into what is perhaps best called the sociology of traditions.

Before going on to discuss notions of tradition among the Beravā it is worthwhile pointing out that throughout the rest of the chapter, I refer primarily to people of the Beravā caste who have received a specialist knowledge or skill which pre-existed them in the caste. In other words, I focus on those who have received, by some chain of transmission, knowledge and skill and who are also in a position to pass these on. In view of the wider aims of this thesis, particular attention is paid to the various

ritual specialists within the caste.

The Sinhalese term which corresponds most closely with our idea of traditions is that of paramparāva, defined in the dictionary (Carter 1965) as race, lineage or order. In its local usage this term designates a chain of transmission, which may or may not be kin based, between teachers (gurunnānse) and pupils (gōlayō). Thus, Buddhist priests have chains of pupillary succession (śiṣyānu śiṣya paramparāva), ritual specialists will speak of the chain of teachers which preceded them (guru paramparāva), and I once even heard a motor-cycle mechanic speak of his paramparāva with respect to the art of motor-cycle maintenance.

In other contexts the term paramparāva approximates to our idea of pedigree and amongst the Beravā, for whom the passage of knowledge and skills is almost entirely kin based, traditions and the genealogical pedigree upon which they hang are virtually synonymous. One's teachers are kinsmen, as are one's pupils, in a chain of human testimony which may extend back over several generations. One's paramparāva can be presented as a charter of legitimation giving authenticity to both act and actor in the present. Knowledge, and from whom one acquired it, is furthermore a source of status within the community. The transmission of traditions, as we shall see, is not indiscriminate, but follows closely the logic of the



kinship structure.

The term knowledge, as a concomitant of traditions, is used frequently throughout this chapter and it is necessary to specify more closely the area of experience to which this refers. Knowledge here is not taken to be knowledge in the abstract but rather as practical mastery; how one does, not how one explains. It is the knowledge of the artisan and craftsman, imparted and instilled by demonstration and repetition. The patchwork of knowledge transmitted in the form of traditions provides the wherewithal to occupation and, as such, is fundamental in the determination of social perspectives within the community. However, this does not preclude an investigation of knowledge in the abstract, but forms a necessary starting point if we are to go beyond purely functionalist explanations of Tradition to an understanding of the structural relationship between its content and the people who work and identify through it.

In an attempt to 'pin down' traditions and the knowledge and skills which comprise them, even further, I now turn to a discussion of property, exploring the hypothesis that, for certain sections of the Beravā community, traditions function as a form of property. Or perhaps, more specifically, they are an ideological fabrication of a similar order to ideas about property found elsewhere in Sinhalese society in relation to property of a more tangible kind.

### 3.3 "traditions" as property

For anthropologists, property and property relations are of prime importance. They are important as statements of the relationship between people and things, but they are of more fundamental importance from the point of view of the relationships between people which things imply and determine. Property relations are basically a type of social relation, a point echoed by Leach speaking of Pul Eliya, a village in the North of Sri Lanka:

'...kinship relations have no 'reality' at all except in relation to land and property. What the social anthropologist calls kinship structure is just another way of talking about property relations.'

(Leach 1961:305)

Property, owned, inherited, and exchanged is a primary motive force in social relations, giving symbolic and material content to abstract structures.

In Sinhalese society the property par excellence is land, and agriculture the primary mode of subsistence. In general, the term 'property' has been used in the Sinhalese context to mean immovable property in which persons have rights of ownership. Kinship, marriage, and residence patterns and their changing configuration through time have all been understood with respect to this primary referent. Among the impressive list of contributors to this topic one can cite Tambiah (1958 and 1965), Yalman (1967), with Leach (1961) for the Kandyan case, and Obeyesekere (1967) for an explication of land

tenure and social organisation in the Low Country. However, it is not my intention to enter into the various debates on kinship and property per se, but rather to ask what situation prevails among groups who for the most part remain landless and poor. The Beravā, in the South at least, are largely excluded from agriculture, and land as a transmissible resource is in short supply for residence, let alone cultivation. Tambiah (1965:170-171) concludes that, unlike propertied persons in a village, those with little or no property tend to have 'diffuse and ineffective kinship ties' with little or no premium placed on the types of marriage contracted. Whilst my own conclusions in this respect will later be seen to be broadly in agreement with Tambiah's, my experience with the Beravā would appear to contradict this. Despite a relative absence of 'property', certain factions of the Beravā community do appear to engage in kinship strategies as if they were propertied; namely, unholding the 'fictions' of gedara, an agnatically recruited household unit, of dīga, that is, patrilocal residence and cross-cousin marriage.

It could be argued that there is no contradiction at all here and that the Beravā are simply reproducing the same strategies with relatively less resources within the community. The discriminations are more minute but nonetheless there. People do own residential plots and houses: some are more substantial than others and have



greater antiquity and identity as gedara. No doubt this goes some of the way to ironing out the contradiction but my own view is that to understand the contradiction fully we must look more widely at the notion of property.

Despite being poor in material property, one area in which the Beravā are undoubtedly 'rich', is in knowledge and skills traditionally the preserve of the caste. Although a somewhat unconventional form of property, I hope to illustrate the ways in which they fulfill a similar ideological role to other kinds of more orthodox property as a resource around which kinship and social relations are structured. The knowledge and skills which comprise traditions are the 'property' of individuals and, like other kinds of property, decisions have to be made concerning their acquisition, maintenance, utilisation, protection and disposal. Learning, practical mastery and transmission all take place within a kinship idiom and as such the traditions are woven into the fabric of social relations.

Like other kinds of property, traditions are an important economic resource upon which the community depends for its livelihood. In Beragoda, for example, most of the occupants rely on the provision of services to the wider community for their income. The fact that the production of artefact or ritual is often the only means they have of earning their livelihood places them in a special relationship with their various crafts. Belying

the romantic image of dancers, exorcists, sorcerers, and artists is a more sober reality based on the pragmatics of subsistence from low-status professions. One important aspect of such pragmatics is the protection and preservation of traditions as a crucial resource possessed by certain sections of the community. As a productive resource they must be carefully managed and access to them restricted. The reproduction of traditions is subject to rigid controls and the conveyance of knowledge and skills follows closely a 'morality', to use Stirrat's term, 'a morality which stresses the protection and concentration of property within a group of in-marrying kin' (Stirrat 1977:288-290). Although referring to the relationship between agricultural communities and certain usages of the Dravidian kinship system, a similar case could be made here in view of the importance of continuity and co-operation for those deriving their livelihood from the application of traditional knowledge and skills. Just as Tambiah (1958:44) was led to conclude that 'the gedara despite its superficial resemblance to a 'patrilineage' turns out to be a grouping based in land tenure rather than in kinship'. I also, would suggest that in this context, traditions provide a similar focus of corporation and co-operation. These traditions are a shared resource with a history of transmission (guru paramparāva) and continuous strategies of containment, which together give fleeting impressions of corporate groups based on kinship.

Given the niche which the Beravā occupy in the overall division of labour in Sinhalese society and the nature of the services they supply, which often place them in a precarious relationship with their patrons, a definite ceiling is placed on the numbers of exorcists, astrologers and temple artists that can be gainfully employed in any one area. Strategies for transmission are vital if dispersal and saturation is to be avoided and consolidation and efficiency maximised. In the often ruthless competition for work and recognition the less able and less well connected within the community fall by the wayside. As there are 'landless' people, so there are also 'knowledgeless' people, those who, for whatever reason, do not possess and cannot make claim on the heritage which some of their caste brethren still possess. An equitable balance, albeit unstable, exists between knowledge and skills-potentially transmissible within the community on the one hand and work force given legitimate access to that knowledge through teachers.

In the field of ritual traditions there are individuals in possession of different types or portions of traditional knowledge and this provides the basis for a complex division of labour within the community. A concomitant of this division of labour is the necessity for co-operation in the many sizes and categories of ritual provided for the wider society. Possession of different amounts and qualities of knowledge and skill



forms the basis of hierarchical differentiation within the community. Greater knowledge and skill gives greater versatility, increasing earning power and status vis a vis other performers. In recruiting personnel for some corporate ritual act, it might be said that kinship provides the quantitative aspects whereas individual skill, ability and reputation (prasiddaya) provides the qualitative dimension. Whether the task is to organise a troupe of exorcists, gather a troupe of temple musicians or to recruit a labour force to renovate a temple, the kinsmen must be able to work together, ideally acknowledging and complementing each other's role and status.

In the above I have outlined some of the ways in which knowledge and skills can be considered a form of property and later in the chapter I go on to illustrate this thesis in practice. However, it would be wrong to see knowledge and skill as the same as property and three important differences need to be outlined.

The primary difference relates to the fact that knowledge and skill are not valid currencies outside of the relatively limited context of its 'ownership' within the caste. Knowledge and skill cannot be converted into other forms of property outside of the caste community. The activation of traditions in the production of ritual or artefact brings its rewards, as land produces its crops, but unlike land, knowledge and skill cannot be

bought and sold. It remains a property virtually inseparable from the people traditionally invested with that knowledge. For those who remain in the bosom of tradition, having received something from the past and being in a position to pass it on to the future, there is at least something other than simple labour with which to co-operate and reciprocate. Alternatively, for those who relinquish or are alienated from their traditional heritage, the most valuable resource the community possesses is rendered worthless. New identities must be forged as traditional ones are emptied of their meaning.

The second difference relates to the non-material nature of knowledge and skill. The ownership of material property is relatively straightforward with notions of the relationship clearly laid out in Sinhalese culture and law. However, when we propose to look at the ownership of ideas and personal skills, which are in theory infinitely reproducible, as property, a number of problems arise. For example, a particular poem or piece of information can be taught to a large number of individuals. A piece of land on the other hand can only be owned by a limited number of individuals, each time it is divided the portions get smaller. Repeated impartings of a poem do not diminish the poem which ideally remains unchanged. Similarly, there are no deeds of ownership to particular types of knowledge or skill other than peoples' reputations. Likewise, there are no records of litigation

other than peoples' grudges and tales of injustices done in the past.

Nevertheless, within the community, knowledge and skills are finely calibrated and those involved in ritual performance can often point out minute details concerning the pedigree of techniques amongst their contemporaries. They are even able to point out which bits of a performer's repertoire were obtained by cribbing or copying, known as horamāra, literally 'stolen tactics'.

As a resource, knowledge and skills are made artificially scarce on the one hand because of external laws of supply and demand and on the other by their use as an index of status within the community. In view of the non-material nature of knowledge and skills, protection and concentration are vital if saturation and devaluation is to be avoided. Control and management is essential if its premium is to be maintained.

A third and final difference, concerns the Sinhalese ideal of bilateral inheritance, an ideal impossible to achieve given that women do not engage in apprenticeship and neither can they perform or produce in the traditional arena. On the surface they are excluded from the process of transmission but, as I illustrate later, they do in fact play a fundamental role in the strategies which surround kinship and the transmission of knowledge. Women and their movement at marriage provide a crucial means whereby the transmission of traditions become possible.



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In the following sections I describe the particular circumstances of the transmission of traditions in Beragoda. The process of learning is not one with clearly defined sequences and stages but takes place over many years in the course of socialisation and eventual adulthood in a community whose energies have been traditionally directed towards ritual production and performance. In examining the personal histories of the various categories of specialists, I was repeatedly impressed by the versatility of certain individuals and the range of sources from which their skills were acquired. There is often considerable overlap between different categories of specialisation, with an individual having undergone apprenticeship with several different teachers. The process whereby traditions are passed from one generation to the next is far from simple and is not readily amenable to a straightforward systematisation. However, an attempt has been made to illustrate the process of transmission in all its aspects, whilst at the same time maintaining a feel for the fluid and fascinating context in which it occurs.

#### 3.4 Teachers and pupils: a ritual apprenticeship

In the first place it must be said that children, from a very early age, are socialised into a powerful rhythm within the community. They do not so much learn, as learn

how to learn, in Bateson's sense of deutero-learning, in the total context of the community and its history. Children grow up in almost perpetual earshot of the sound of the drum and it is even said that by virtue of being born into a Beravā family a child can play the davul bera, the temple drum. They are familiar with a world in which the accoutrements of ritual, such as drums, masks, costumes and the like are being made and used. Fear and respect for these objects are instilled from a very early age. Boys will 'play' on the drums and 'play' at dancing using masks made from leaves and paper. From an early age children are exposed to a wide range of stimuli connected with vocations traditional to the community. Early laying down of implicit patterns and processes no doubt forms the foundations for the fluidity and confidence often manifest in the performances of adult members of the community.

In the early years, however, there is little attempt to direct a child into any particular vocation but rather it is felt that given time a child will show aptitude for certain activities. A boy is exposed to various opportunities in which aptitude might be shown. Judgement is made according to the speed with which new actions are grasped and the degree of interest shown.

The question of aptitude or rather pre-disposition (pera purudukama) was explained to me by one informant in terms which can best be described as a cross between

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the inheritance of acquired characteristics and the law of karma. On the one hand there is the assumption that the sons of fathers who excel in a certain art or craft should also excel in that field. Should they show promise in another field it might, on the other hand, be suggested that they were of that profession in a previous life. The implication made by one informant was that people who had been drummers in previous lives would be reborn as the sons of drummers. However, I was not sure whether this was intended as a blessing or a curse. Finally, the idea of predisposition was used to explain how there came to be so many clever people (dakṣa minissu) in Berāgoda.

As boys grow older, their creativity is increasingly channelled and directed by parents who are often all too aware of the limitations of their caste and its prescribed vocations. A boy usually moves towards the vocations of his father, accompanying him to places of work such as exorcisms, temples, processions etc. on each occasion observing and absorbing. At home a boy will receive more formal instruction in the simpler aspects of the work. For example, the training of dancers starts with steps and exercises carried out with the aid of a rail (tē kanda) similar to that used by ballet dancers. Long periods will also be spent learning by rote the verses which comprise the immense poetic tradition upon which many rituals are based.

If a man has sufficient resources, he may take it upon



himself to oversee all aspects of his son's education in the traditional skills until he becomes a competent performer in his own right. However, few fathers can lay claim to such versatility and at some time during adolescence there is an attempt to exploit teaching resources outside of the immediate agnatic group. This usually takes the form of a request that a kinsman undertake responsibility for certain aspects of a boy's education. This shift, from a father as teacher to someone else, during adolescence, fulfills a number of important functions in the process of learning.

In the first place the recruitment of kinsmen as teachers is part of a wider ideology of assistance and exchange whereby previous teaching relationships, usually mediated by women, form the basis for future relationships: a pupil may be called upon to teach close relations of his teacher in later life. Such relationships, if successful, can either serve to enrich the training already given by a father or else provide a boy with access to wholly new skills. Parents can exert considerable power over the allotment of skills within a family and particularly amongst male siblings. Brothers are often directed into different areas of specialisation as a deliberate strategy to maintain diversity and adaptability within the family.

Secondly, the movement of a boy to study with a kinsman serves to take the pressure out of what is often a

very tense relationship. Traditionally the relationship between a father and son is one of distance and respect and, in this context, is not particularly conducive to the imparting of knowledge. The problem is further compounded when it is remembered that a father and son will ultimately be in contention for position and status within the patriline. For these reasons, teaching relationships with fathers and fathers' brothers (bāpa) are claimed by informants to be unsuccessful and prone to difficulties. The kinsmen most commonly called upon to teach a boy will be the mother's brother (māmā) actual or classificatory; a kinsman who is traditionally in a close and affectionate relationship with his sister's son. Yalman further bears this point out generally:

'...bāna (si. son) has claims on the MB.  
He can usually expect to be treated like a son at the MB's house and there are frequent cases of the MB taking over the education of the sister's son, almost adopting him.'  
(Yalman 1967:270)

Yalman's words also bring to mind the example of Gomez (E9) (see page 93 ).

Finally, the shift of focus from the immediate family to a more distant kinsman is important in that it takes a boy out of the security of his natal home into a less predictable and more unfamiliar environment. In this sense the apprenticing of a child to a teacher other than the father or his brothers serves, as a rite de passage in the anthropological sense of the term. The child leaves home, possibly for the first time, to reside for between

two to five years in the household of his teacher. The teacher may live at some distance from the boy's natal village and may be virtually unknown to the boy, even though close relationships may exist with the boy's parents. The boy leaves his village at an auspicious time (nākat velāva), bearing honorific gifts for his teacher, to commence what in some cases proves to be a long and gruelling experience. It is the responsibility of the teacher to impart as much knowledge as he thinks fit and, as with other types of inheritance, the recipient has to prove himself worthy of it. The teacher is responsible for the physical and emotional welfare of the boy and has to 'make' the pupil (gōlaya hadanavā). In the past, the 'making' of a pupil, despite the closeness between a boy and his maternal uncle, was often hard and demoralising. One man told of the scars his father used to exhibit on his back, received from his teacher who beat him with a burning torch, for lack of discipline. Another teacher, speaking of an exorcist he had taught as a boy, laughed uproariously as he recalled the times when he had caused the boy to urinate with fright and regularly confined him to the lavatory where, weeping and shaking, he would be forced to stay for hours on end.

As with any apprenticeship, the novice starts at the bottom of a weighty hierarchy. He is the brunt of jokes and pranks, the performer of menial tasks and general dog's body. At exorcism ceremonies a pupil will be



required to carry his teacher's clothes box (āndun peṭṭiya) and help with the making up of the dancers. Once he proves familiar with the sequences and techniques involved in the ritual he may be allowed to perform small parts, perhaps the recitation in public of a certain verse or poem. The ascent through various levels of sophistication and ability takes many months with responsibility being achieved before it is granted. By late adolescence a successful pupil will be in command of the basic vocabulary of his trade; he may then go on to spend a lifetime becoming ever more articulate and fluent in the language it makes possible.

Aside from qualifications based on kinship between a teacher and his pupil, the teacher should also exhibit characteristics which make him suitable for the role. The primary qualification, outside of kinship, is that of reputation, an aura and authority built up over years of experience. Reputation is further based on who one's teachers were and who theirs were, and similarly, on who one can number amongst one's own pupils.

Older and more established teachers are addressed, both within and without the Berava community, by a variety of honorific titles which recognise their achievement in different fields. The elite body of specialists who have reached the top of the ladder in the field of exorcism and related skills are called gurunnānse, literally 'teacher'. For example, K.G. Edōris (C2) was known to all

in the village of Beragoda as Edō Gurunnānse. However, not all teachers reach the status of gurunnānse. Many, although referred to as gurunnānse within the teaching relationship, are not publicly called by the honorific title. The usage adopted throughout the chapter is the latter sense, that is, gurunnānse as a general term for teacher, and not referring solely to the aged and eminent few who are addressed by this title.

Similarly, other titles connote arrival in the master classes. For example, an artist might have the word sitare or 'painter' attached to his name, or a mason the word bās, a shortened form of bās unā, meaning 'venerable artisan'. All however, study under a gurunnānse, a teacher.

Despite the severity which pupils often encounter in the course of their apprenticeships, teachers are usually spoken of with great affection and respect and are treated with considerable deference. Relationships often continue after the completion of an apprenticeship and contacts are maintained over many years with frequent visits of both social and technical nature. The gift of knowledge, however, is not a debt easily discharged, as is clear from the number of teachers who do not feel their pupils afford them adequate respect and attention.

In reply to questions concerning their learning pedigree, informants would often cite only one person as their gurunnānse even though they may have had several

teachers in their rise to competence. Pedigrees of learning (guru paramparāva) are presented and used in a similar way to kinship genealogies as a means of validating prestige and status; certain relationships are forgotten whilst others are exaggerated. A good example of this is seen in the case of a temple artist who claimed to have undergone an apprenticeship with Sarlis, the renowned temple painter. I only later discovered that the man had been born two years after the death of Sarlis but had in fact undergone an apprenticeship with one of Sarlis' pupils.

Not all teaching relationships are successful. Many break down before completion, while others produce performers destined for mediocrity. The great variety in quality and intensity of teaching relationships can in part be attributed to the hierarchical, and often fiercely competitive nature of the relationship between a teacher and his pupils. For a teacher to maintain his personal position and prestige he also has to maintain differentials in the amounts of knowledge and skills possessed and his pupils are a primary threat in this respect.

The relationship between a teacher and his pupil might break down for purely personal reasons, with each blaming the other for shortcomings in the expected role. A teacher will criticise a pupil for being lazy and uninterested, using this as grounds to curtail the extent



of his teaching. With knowledge and skill, particularly as it relates to exorcism and healing, goes power and responsibility and at each stage the pupil must show that he is capable of handling both: the sorcerer's apprentice readily comes to mind.

Alternatively, teachers are frequently criticised by their pupils and their parents. Many specialists are very concerned about their position vis a vis other specialists in their field, particularly possible future contenders of their own creation. The premier positions in the various skills and the holders of those positions in the village and the wider locality are known, respected and coveted by those who occupy lesser positions in the hierarchy. The question of prestige (tatvaya) as a performer, is an important index of power within the community, running parallel with hierarchies based on age and kinship position. The degree of mastery of a particular skill or set of skills can, in practice, ensure a plentiful supply of work, the possibility of good marriages within the family and respect within the community. To this end teachers will not only regulate to whom they pass on their skills but the amounts they pass on. The retention of knowledge and information by teachers from their pupils is given cultural recognition in the concept of gurumustī, a term which refers to the portion of knowledge which is withheld by the teacher to ensure that the pupil does not surpass him.

Futhermore, it is the gurumustī which, theoretically at least, keeps the pupil in awe of his teacher.

The retention of knowledge by teachers for the sake of their own position would appear to reach somewhat self-defeating lengths in some cases. For example, a number of performers complained that their teachers had actually passed on wrong information, changing the words of formulae and missing verses out from poems so as to make their eventual performance less effective. In another case, an old ādura, shortly before his death, had taken his entire collection of palm leaf books, containing poems, mantra and yantra into the forest where he had burnt them. Such a wanton erasure of knowledge and tradition no doubt ensured that no successor was able to rise above his position and perhaps in some way ensured a degree of immortality.

The retention of information by teachers is often the basis for criticism (dos) and jealousy (īrsyāva) with the gurumustī being brought to light in the arena of performance. It is in this arena that hierarchies are created and recreated, asserted and challenged. It is in the arena that the strategic game of display and conceal is played with bitter undercurrents. Tales of sabotage such as the theft of clothes boxes before a performance, or the charming of anothers drum to make the rhythms off beat thus making the dancers move without vitality (pana nā), are not infrequent. One or two reputed

performers in the area were said to have been poisoned by jealous rivals and accusations of attempted poisonings were common.

Keen awareness of the scope and content of another's knowledge and ability acts as a strong sanction against the cribbing of knowledge from another performer. However, performers would on occasion refrain from reciting certain poems and verses if a certain rival were in the audience or in the arena, fearing their individual style might be illegitimately drafted into the repertoire of another (horamāra). One bali tovil performer or bali ādurā with whom I became very friendly at the end of my stay was in possession of a very erudite poem which had been given to him as a boy by a Buddhist priest. The poem sang praises to Buddha and incorporated the entire Sinhalese alphabet including many now obscure letters and sounds. The skill required for a clear recitation of the poem was great and it was his boast that no one could successfully deliver the entire poem in a bali tovil. He would quite happily recite the poem but would not let me record it for fear I betrayed his confidence. Another younger ādurā had been particularly covetous of the poem and had paid several courtesy visits over the years with the expressed intention of being taught the poem, but to no avail. Shortly before I left, the bali ādurā, still reluctant to let me record the poem, gave me a written copy as a gift, but asked specifically that I did not show it to the



younger Ādurā. For the younger man to have acquired the poem in any way other than directly from the older man could have reflected badly on his integrity as a performer.

In a similar case a yak Ādurā, when asked to recite a particular mantra, laughed and pointed to his son saying that he had not even told him the mantra and if he were to tell him, his position would be lost (mage tatvaya nāti veyi).

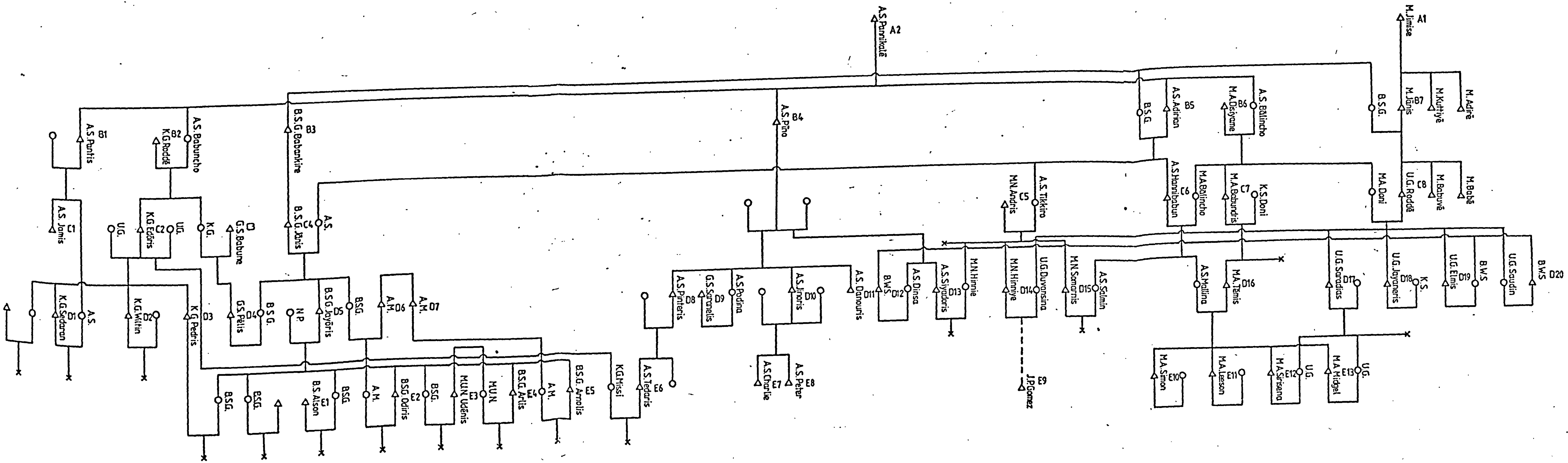
In the above section I have outlined some of the key ideas which relate to the transmission of knowledge and skills between a teacher and his pupils. These ideas illustrate the power teachers have over their various traditions and point to a basic asymmetry in their relationship. Teachers are for the most part respected and venerated, pupils are lazy and unworthy of the gift bestowed upon them. In a particularly Buddhist view of entropy, the winding down of systems, a teacher stands, as he has always stood, as a mediator between an ordered past and disordered future. The patterns of the past are clearly laid out in their traditions and the pedigrees of kinship and learning through which it has flowed down to the present. That the future is uncertain is seen from the number of teachers who feel themselves to be the last in their line, standing on the threshold of chaos, unable to find 'suitable' pupils to continue their skills.

### 3.5 'traditions' and kinship in Beragoda

In the present section I would like to present the data upon which the assertions made in previous sections are based. Particular attention is paid to the treatment of knowledge and skills as property and the role that traditions play as a source of identity and texture in social relationships within the Beravā community.

The data presented is taken from a genealogical chart upon which I was able to include all living residents of the village. The genealogy produced overleaf (Figures 2 and 3) indicates the main relationships between the six key patrilineages within the village (see page 85 ). The account which follows concerns a core of kinsmen living and working in and around Beragoda who have operated as elites in the field of traditional arts and skills.

The mode of presentation is close to the manner in which the information was passed on to me. There is no attempt to conceal the essentially biographical nature of the information presented for two important reasons. In the first place, given the absence of objective sources which document the transmission of knowledge we are forced to rely on statement and counter-statement of the informants themselves. Whether objectively true or false, such data is suggestive of key attitudes and relationships in the process whereby tradition is passed down. Control, acquisition, use and transmission of knowledge and skill, and the delicate inter-twining of these processes with the





sentiments of kinship are clearly laid out in practice. Secondly, documentation of this type serves as an introduction and background to the dramatis personae who figure prominently in later chapters, providing individual identities where before there was only a category identity.

To assist the reader in what may at times be an arduous process<sup>of</sup> referring between text and diagrams, a simple convention has been followed throughout. Proper names are used throughout: preceding the proper names are the initials of the vāsagama title (see page 86 for the actual titles); following each proper name, in brackets, is given a reference combining a number and a letter which relates back to the main genealogical diagram on page 156. The first letter in brackets relates to the generation, 'A' being the top generation and 'E' being the present adult generation. The numbers read from left to right in order (with the exception of M. Jimisē who, as he was something of an apical ancestor, retains the reference 'A1'). Not all individuals on the genealogy are given complete references; some are only given their vāsagama title without any name or reference, while in other cases only the genealogical relationship is indicated.

For further clarity, the main text has been broken up into three sections each of which illustrate various principles concerning the transmission of knowledge in each of the A.S., B.S.G. and M.A. patriline. These

principles are briefly summarised at the end of each section.

### 3.5.1. The strategies of the A.S. patriline:

#### the maintenance of elite performers

The rather arbitrary starting point for a descent through the annals of Beragoda community history is with one A.S. Pīno (B4) born in 1850. He was said to have been born in the same asterism (nākat) as the demon Mahā Sohōn, which earned him the nickname of that demon and also a reputation for skill in exorcising its malign effects; a skill which was to persist for a further three generations.

In the course of his life Pīno had three wives, all of whom came from the coastal town of Mirissa and two of whom had the same vāsagama name.

Pīno learned primarily from his elder brother, Adirian (B5) (b. 1825) who on account of his twenty-five years seniority took a more paternal role in the affairs of the family. Pīno was, by all accounts, a highly skilled performer, skilled in dancing and acrobatics (pillum gāsīma) in the ritual arena of exorcism. He was also an accomplished drummer -- at both -- exorcism -- ceremonies (yak tovil) and at ceremonies to the gods (dēva tovil). He could perform temple drumming (hēvisi), although he never earned from this occupation, and he was an exponent of the now virtually extinct art of puppetry (rukkada).

Pīno made a number of pupils in his lifetime (see Figure 4), the foremost of whom was a man called G.S. Saronelis (D9) from the village of Akurugoda, some seven miles distant. It was to this man that Pīno gave his daughter, A.S. Podina. It was not clear whether Pīno gave his daughter to G.S. Saronelis because he was his best pupil (pradhāna gōlaya) or whether the marriage enabled him to rise to that position. Whichever was the case, the effect was the same, the patrilocal (dīga) marriage of Podina to Saronelis of Akurugoda established an important alliance between the two families. In subsequent years the three brothers of Podina (D8, D10 and D11) all went to Akurugoda to study with Saronelis. Perhaps of even greater significance is the fact that two of Pīno's sons learned the art of cutting sorcery (suniyam) from Saronelis, a skill which did not exist in Pīno's line. It was even suggested that Pīno had engineered the marriage because of the benefits which would ensue from the acquisition of skills in sorcery cutting. (To minimise confusion, sections of the main genealogy are reproduced separately, the dotted lines represent primary teaching relationships.)

Of the three sons of Pīno, Pintēris (D8) was only partially taught by his father and brother-in-law, Saronelis. Pintēris was only given access to the skills associated with exorcism (yak tovil) and his son, Tedaris (E6) claims that Pīno purposely impeded his father's



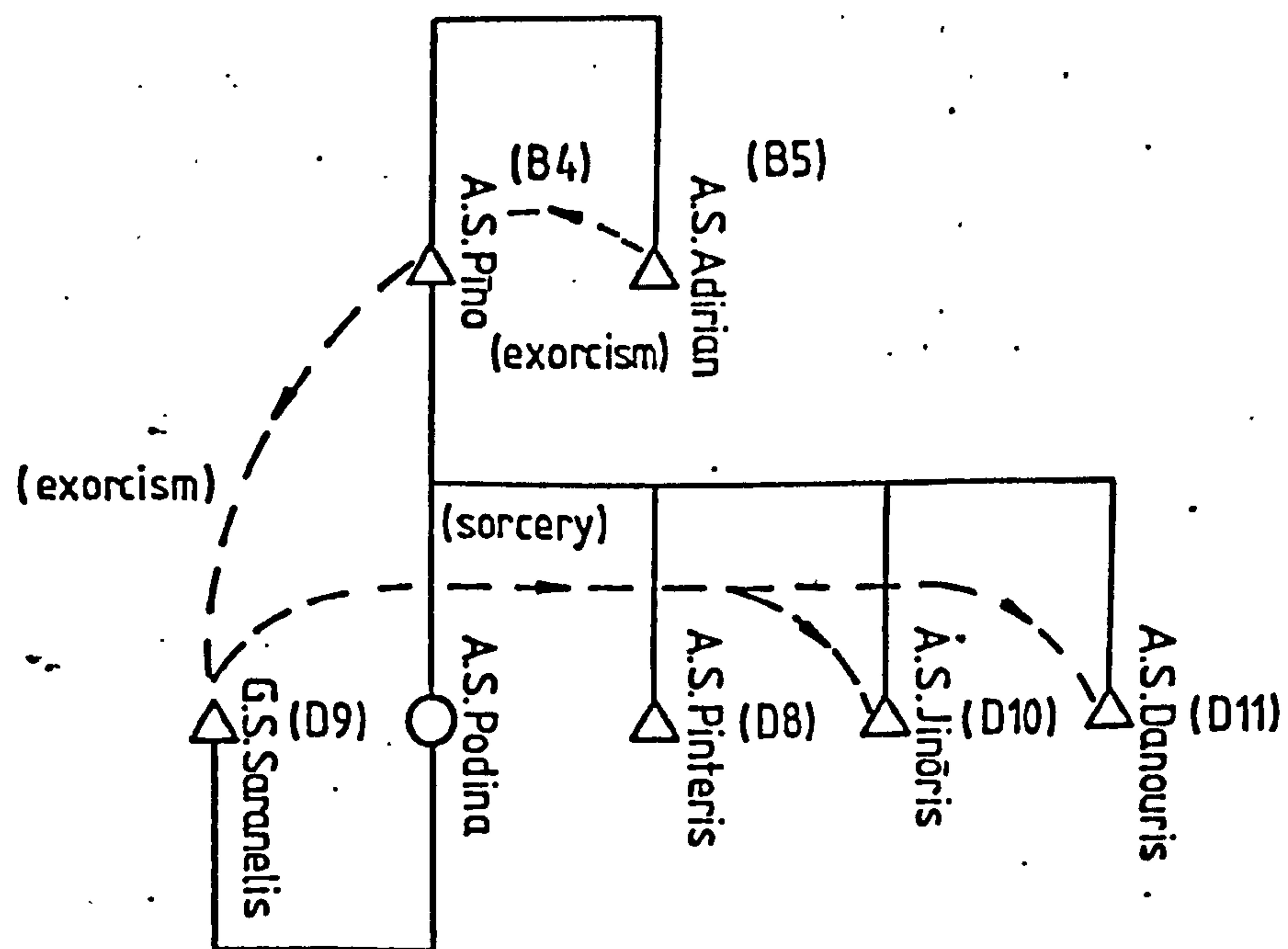


Fig.4 The Acquisition of Suniyam Knowledge

development as a performer. The possible reason for this, although I was never able to confirm it, was that Pintēris had gone against his father in marrying a woman deemed unsuitable.

The other two sons of Pīno both received a complete training in the various ritual skills. Danouris (D11) married a woman from Mātara and took up residence in her village (binna) and subsequently all contact with his line was lost. The third son, Jinōris (D10) remained in the village and ascended to a prime position as a performer within the village. Furthermore, his knowledge of suniyam over and above other members of the village gave him access to wider networks of performing kinsmen.

Pintēris' relationship with his father, Pīno, became even more fraught when he took his own son, Tedaris (E6), at the age of eighteen to Akurugoda to study with Saronelis who was a maternal uncle (māmā) to Tedaris (see Figure 5). The encounter did not prove very auspicious as Pīno was said to have requested Saronelis not to pass on too much information to Tedaris, for fear that his own position in the community was lost. Saronelis complied with the request and despite Tedaris' ardent desire to become a dancer he was never taught enough to become a fully competent performer. After an unsuccessful two years with Saronelis, Tedaris gave up and underwent a five year apprenticeship in carpentry. He is currently recognised as the best carpenter in Beragoda

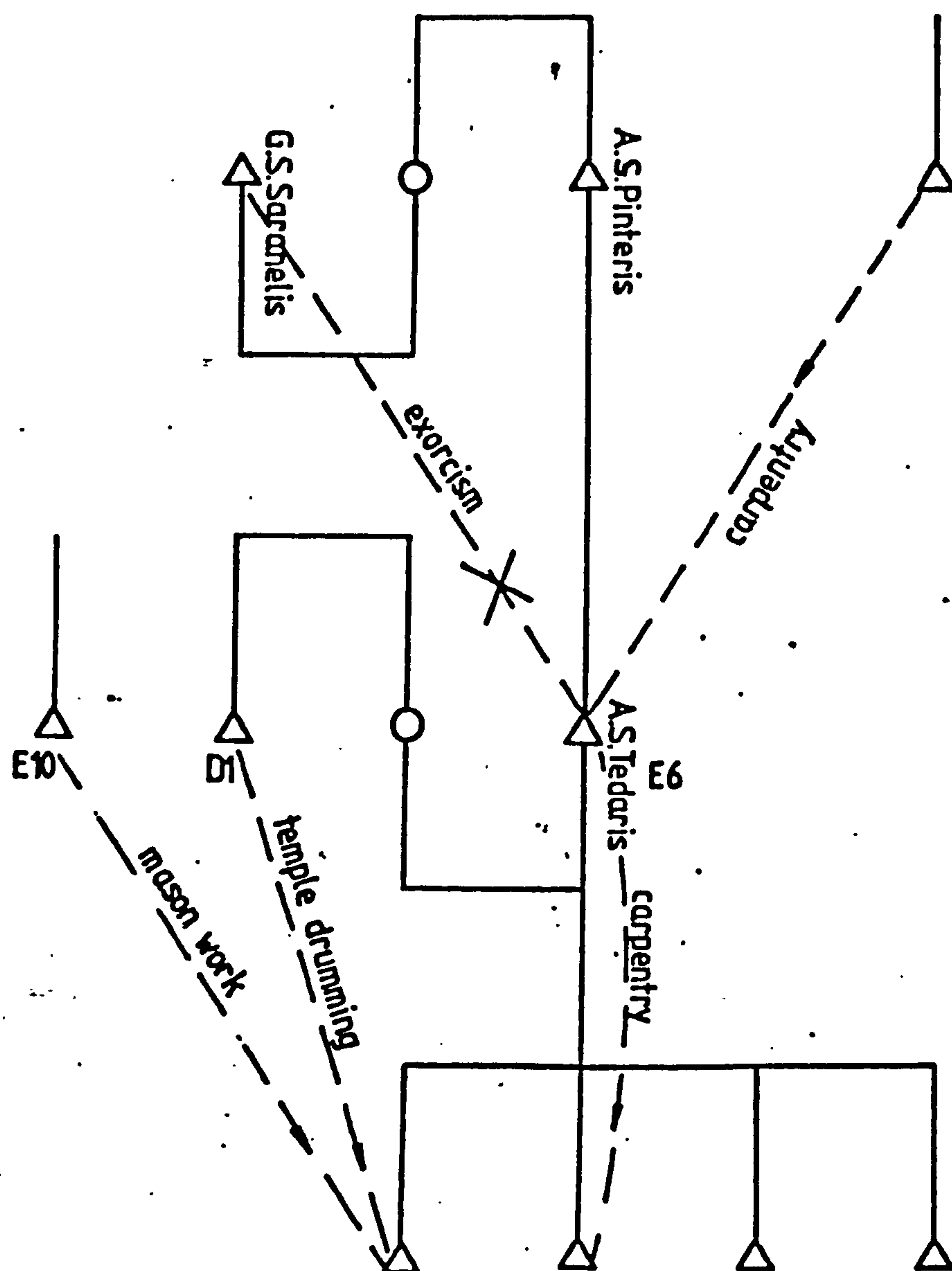


Fig.5. The Heritage of Tedaris



(see page 119).

Significantly, none of the sons of Tedaris took up the vocations for which other members of their line have gained such recognition. One son works as a carpenter with his father, two sons work as shopkeepers in distant towns and the fourth, despite learning temple drumming from his mother's brother (māmā) ended up becoming a mason and house repairer having studied under a more distant classificatory mother's brother.

The rise to prominence of Pīno's son, Jinōris (D10), was facilitated by the removal of his two brothers outside of the competitive arena, one by marriage, the other by exclusion. In both cases the brothers, once removed were effectively deprived from competing for work and status in the Beragoda community. Thus Jinōris was able to succeed his father as one of the community's leading performers.

Jinōris died in 1970 aged eighty-years having been responsible for teaching a large number of pupils, amongst whom are numbered some of the most eminent performers in the Southern Province today. Needless to say, however, the most eminent performers are those in closest kinship proximity (see Figure 6). His eldest son, A.S. Peter (E8) was his foremost pupil and was said to have been an accomplished performer by an early age. Unfortunately he died prematurely, alleged to have been poisoned by a jealous rival. Jinōris' second son, A.S. Charlie (E7) was born a considerable number of years after Peter and

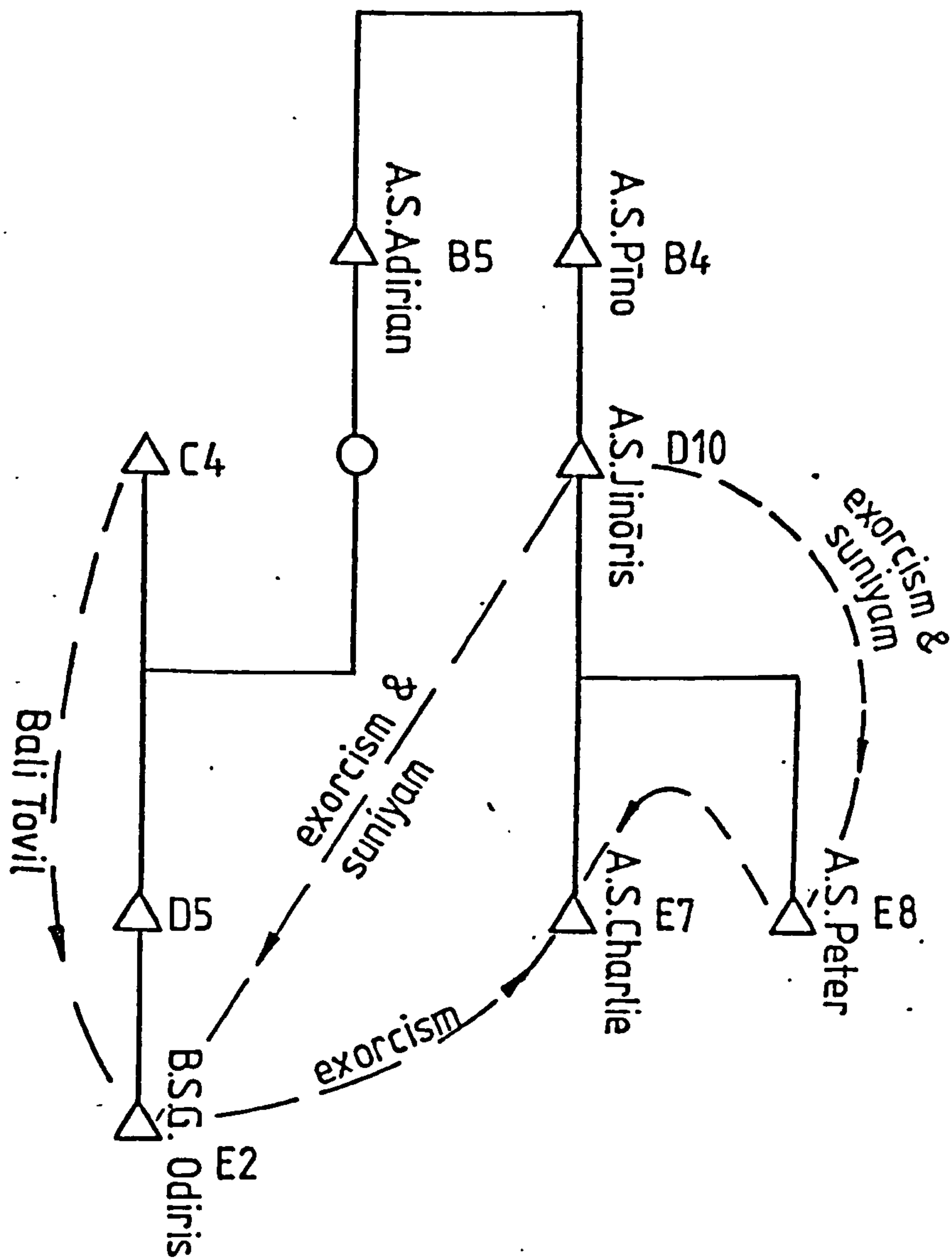


Fig.6. Jinōris's Foremost Pupils

consequently worked with and learned from his brother rather than his father. Charlie too is a versatile performer currently in some demand throughout the region.

Another of A.S. Jinōris' foremost pupils was the grandson of his classificatory sister's husband, a man named B.S.G. Odiris (E2). The conjunction of knowledge from his own patriline and from his grandmother's line makes Odiris one of the most versatile and knowledgeable performers in Beragoda today. He is skilled in the five major rituals performed by the Beravā, namely, Sanni Yakkuma, Raṭa Yakkuma, Mahā Sohōna Samayama (and Ira Mudun Samayama), Bali Tovil and Suniyam. Odiris studied alongside Peter from Jinōris in the art of yak tovil and Suniyam. In time Odiris went on to teach Charlie, the son of his own teacher, after the death of Peter.

In this example of the strategies of the A.S. patriline, a number of important points emerge which have critical long-term consequences for the way in which traditions are passed down. Firstly, the relationship between A.S. Pīno (B4) and G.S. Saronelis (D9) illustrates the close relationship between teaching and inter-marriage. Saronelis was not only Pīno's son in law but also his foremost pupil. With the movement of Pīno's daughter to Saronelis' village, an important alliance was established. Secondly, the alliance between the families enabled the sons of Pīno to benefit from Saronelis' experience and particularly in the art of Suniyam.



previously unknown to Pīno. In establishing a productive alliance with Saronelis, Pīno was presumably faced with the question of how his three sons were to be trained; he had certain resources at his command but for obvious reasons it would make little sense to train them all to the same level. To this effect only two were actually fully taught and the third, A.S. Pinteris (D8) appears to have been impeded by his father in acquiring knowledge and skills associated with exorcism. This illustrates the third point, namely that parents have considerable power over the allotment of skills amongst male siblings. Furthermore, as the case of Tedaris (E6) and his children illustrates, the directives given by Pīno had the ultimate effect of alienating descendants in that particular line from the traditional skills associated with the family. Fourthly, the example illustrates quite neatly how a performer of considerable skill and reknown, A.S. Jinōris (D10), emerged as the main performer from the A.S. line in Beragoda. Contenders within the family were removed and Jinōris came forward as something of a focal performer commanding extensive networks of teaching and performance. Finally, we can see how, once in this position, Jinōris was able to direct the resources at his disposal for the benefit of his own children and the children of other key performers in the village. Knowledge passed to his sister's grandson, B.S.G. Odiris (E2) as a boy, was passed back to Jinōris' youngest son, A.S. Charlie (E7) when

Odiris was an accomplished performer and Jinōris was an old man.

### 3.5.11. The strategies of B.S.G. patriline:

#### the consolidation of traditions

In this second example we begin with another important figure in the transmission of ritual traditions in Beragoda, namely B.S.G. Jānis (C4).

Jānis was born in Beragoda in 1855 and died in 1959 aged 104. During his lifetime he was a man of enormous stature within the community, not least because of his height of six and a half feet and his navel length beard. By all accounts he was a virtuous and dignified man, abhorring drinking and frowning upon those who did. He was, in the words of his grandson, a 'dharmista man', a man dedicated to upholding Buddhist virtues. He was responsible for bringing the first bed, clock and tiled roof to the village [3] and he endeavoured to dispel the image of the Beravā as social outcasts. By his own efforts he constructed a samāgam maduva or village shed, in which he educated the children of the village in etiquette and manners. A further claim to fame was his close relationship with a printing press in Colombo, contributing to their publications and receiving literature and books on astrology in return.[4]

Jānis trained in his youth as a performer of Bali Tovil and exorcism (yak tovil). He was widely renowned

for his skill in constructing and painting the images used in Bali Tovil. From this he earned the appellation, sitare or painter.

It was said that in his youth he sought to marry his cross-cousin (Fa.Si.Da.), A.S. Hencho; an ambition also shared by M.A. Babundris (C7) (see Figure 7). Both contenders were balikāriyō, and both fell into the appropriate category of cross-cousin and rightful spouse (avāssa massina). Hencho's father, in reply to the suitors announced that he would not give his daughter to a simple balikāriya but wanted her to go to a man who could count on his fingers, an allusion to the mnemonic device used by astrologers in their calculations. To this end Jānis underwent an apprenticeship with his mother's brother (māmā) in astrology and was subsequently married to Hencho. [5]

Jānis's strong awareness of the value of morality can be seen not only in his attitudes towards the rest of the village but also with respect to attitudes expressed within his own family. Upon the birth of his grandchildren he expressed a strong desire that they should marry according to the traditional practice of cross cousin marriage (avāssa kassada bandinna). He stated that if the children of his son and daughter married (the marriage of his second daughter remained childless) then he would pass onto them both property, in the form of the paternal residence and knowledge, without



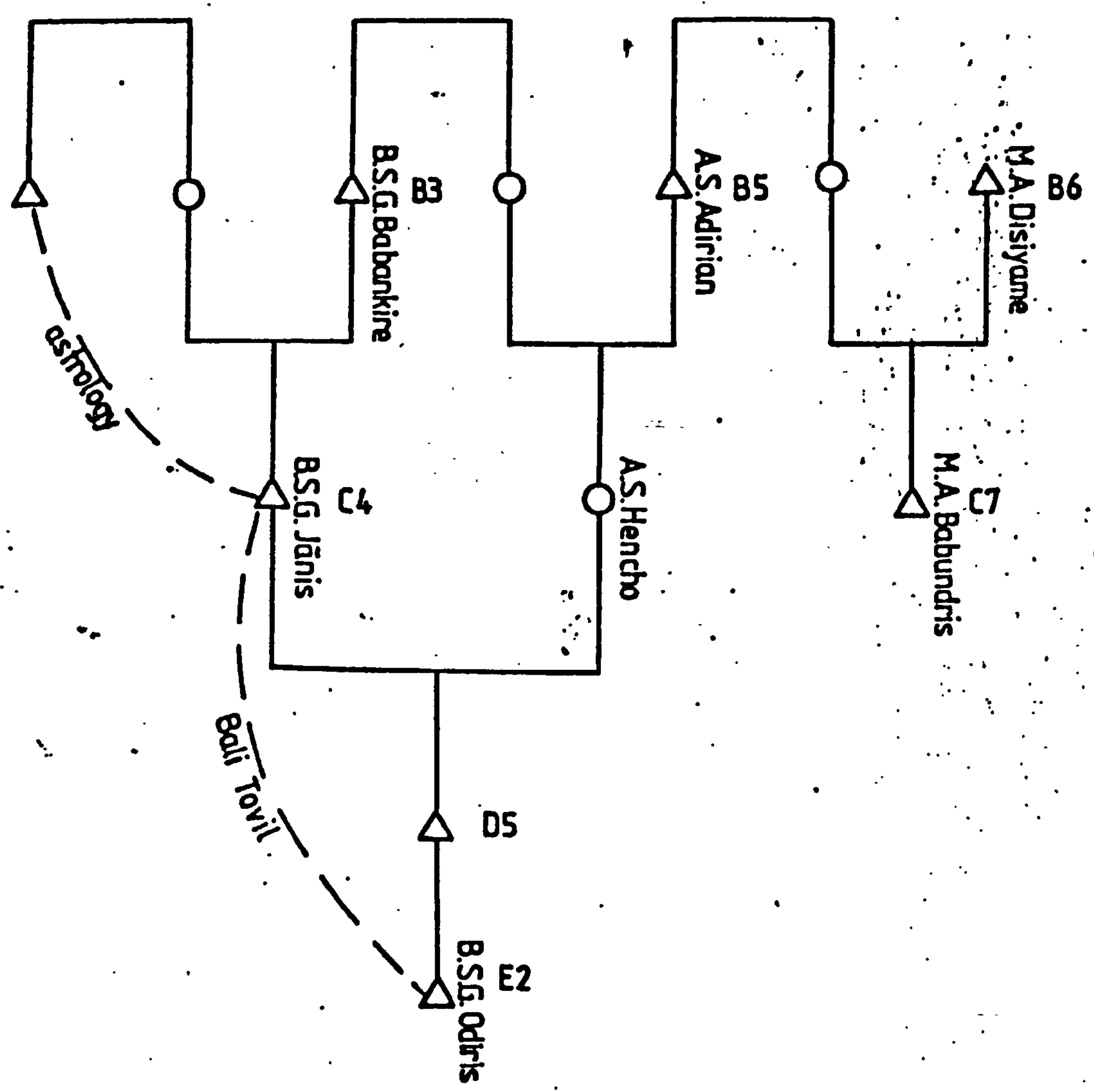


Fig.7 The Marriage of Jānis

gurumustī, in the form of his extensive knowledge of Bali Tovil and astrology. The strategy which Jānis envisaged was realised and both Odiris and his wife received property and extensive education from their grandfather (see Figure 8). On the wall of their house is a photograph of Odiris and his wife seated together, whilst standing over them with an arm on each of their shoulders is Jānis.

Odiris acquired knowledge of Bali Tovil and his wife trained as an astrologer and inherited a large collection of astrology books from Jānis. Today she is able to make a substantial contribution to the family coffers from her work as an astrologer.

The effect of the strategy which Jānis appears to have consciously put into operation, was to realise the ideal of property transmission in a system ideally based on repeated cross-cousin marriage; that is, to reconsolidate in the third generation that which is potentially fragmented in the second. The marked affinity between grandparents and grandchildren is in opposition to the distance and underlying tensions which characterise the relationship between a father and his sons. Indeed, Odiris' father, upon the death of his first wife, moved out of the paternal residence to her village, leaving Odiris and his wife to tend to their grandfather in his final years.

In view of the impressive range of skills received by

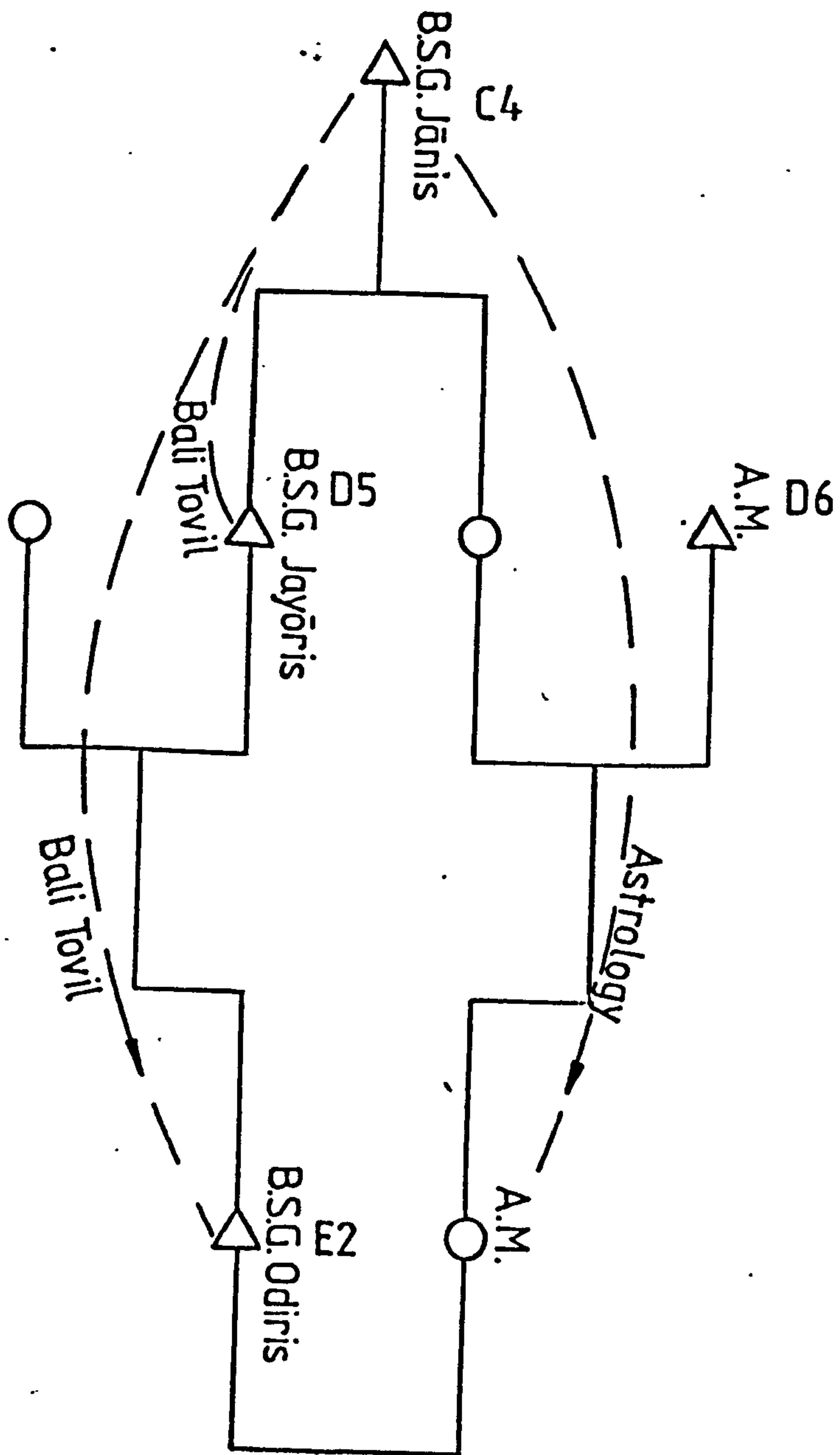


Fig. 8 Jānis's Strategy



virtue of Odiris' position in the kinship system, the occupations of his two younger brothers are revealing. One of the brothers became a tailor in Galle and the other, Arnolis (E5), became a temple artist, both being directed away from the traditional activities of their line (see page 114 for details of Arnolis).

Of the four sisters of Odiris, two remained in Beragoda after marriage and two married outside the village. Of the sisters who married outside the village, one married a man from Ambalangoda and after taking up residence there, lost all contact with her family. The other daughter married a renowned balikāriyā who had also been a pupil of her father (see Figure 9). Of the two who married in the village, one married a drummer, a virtuoso in the somewhat rare art of Bali Tovil drumming. There is a further connection in this instance because the father of the drummer, K.G. Pedris (D3), had been one of the teachers of Jayōris, that is his wife's father. In years gone by Pedris regularly provided drumming services to Jayōris and Odiris when they performed major Bali Tovil together. The fourth daughter married a powerful exorcist and mantrakāriyā who also regularly performs with Odiris.

A further point to note in Figure 9 is that a brother and a sister of Odiris are both married into the M.U.N. patriline. The marriage of brothers and sisters is found in a number of other cases throughout the genealogy and



could be seen as an exchange between families which cancels out in a single generation, unlike cross-cousin marriages which maintain an asymmetry between successive generations.

As in the previous example, once again we can extract a number of important points from the data presented. In the first place, Jānis was undoubtedly a character of considerable charisma and it would appear that he was involved in attempts, via his ardent Buddhist beliefs and practices, to assert and elevate the standing of the Beravā in his area. Crucial in his endeavours, I would suggest was a keen, almost objective, awareness of the role which traditions played in his community. This is hardly surprising when it is recalled that in order to marry his rightful spouse, his cross-cousin, he had to compete with another of her cross-cousins by acquiring the more superior skills of astrology. Similarly, within his own family the linking of the practice of cross-cousin marriage with particular aspects of knowledge and skill was used as a consciously conceived strategy. By asserting pressure on his grandchildren to marry, Jānis was able to ensure that the many skills which he had acquired in his long and colourful life would be consolidated rather than dispersed.

Central to this process was, of course, the grandson of Jānis, B.S.G. Odiris (E2), because he was the person who came to acquire the ritual knowledge and skills of his



5

father and grandfather. As in the previous example it is instructive to look at the occupations of other brothers in such circumstances. As before they either took up different professions, moved away from the village, or both. For those that took up other professions, other kin resources were exploited to provide them with access to different knowledge and skills. As in many cases the relationship used to introduce new skills into a family is that of the mother's brother, as in the case of Arnolis (E5).

A final and most important point to emerge from this example concerns the role of female siblings. With the exception of one of Odiris' four sisters, all married ritual performers of different types who, in addition to previous teaching relationships with the B.S.G. line, went on to perform regularly with their wives' brother (Odiris) and their father - (Jayōris). The importance of this relationship, and in particular that between brothers-in-law, will be seen more fully in the following chapter which deals with the formation of troupes for ritual performance.

### 3.5.111. The M.A. patriline: strategic alliance and the break-up of an elite

With the brother-in-law of A.S. Pīno, M.A. Disiyamē (B6) we begin our third genealogical descent. Disiyamē was born in the coastal town of Mirissa around 1825 and

migrated to Beragoda after his marriage to A.S. Bālincho, the sister of Pīno. After taking up residence in Beragoda, he worked closely with this wife's brothers in the performance of small Bali rituals called mal baliya. In time, one of Disiyamē's daughters, M.A. Bālincho, married one of A.S. Adirian's sons, A.S. Hinnibabun (C6), her actual cross-cousin (Mo.Br.So.) (see Figure 10). The marriage consolidated co-operation and exchange between the A.S. and M.A. lines and is seen in later generations in the reproduction of actual cross-cousin marriages centred on the house which Disiyamē built when he came to Beragoda. In the present day the house is occupied by M.A. Tēmī and A.S. Mallina.

A.S. Hinnibabun like his father was a puppet maker and dancer. He was also skilled as a drummer and balikāriyā. A.S. Mallina, his daughter, recalled how he had spoken of the time when he had drummed before the King of Siam when he had visited Ceylon around the turn of the century. Significantly, the men who danced with him on this occasion were B.S.G. Jānis (C4), M.A. Babundris (C7) and A.S. Pīno (B4), a configuration illustrating the networks of traditions and patterns of co-operation embodied in the future performances of their sons and grandsons. In response to the requirements of a major ceremonial event then, as today, the various threads of traditions are drawn together to realise Tradition for the audience and community for the Beravā.

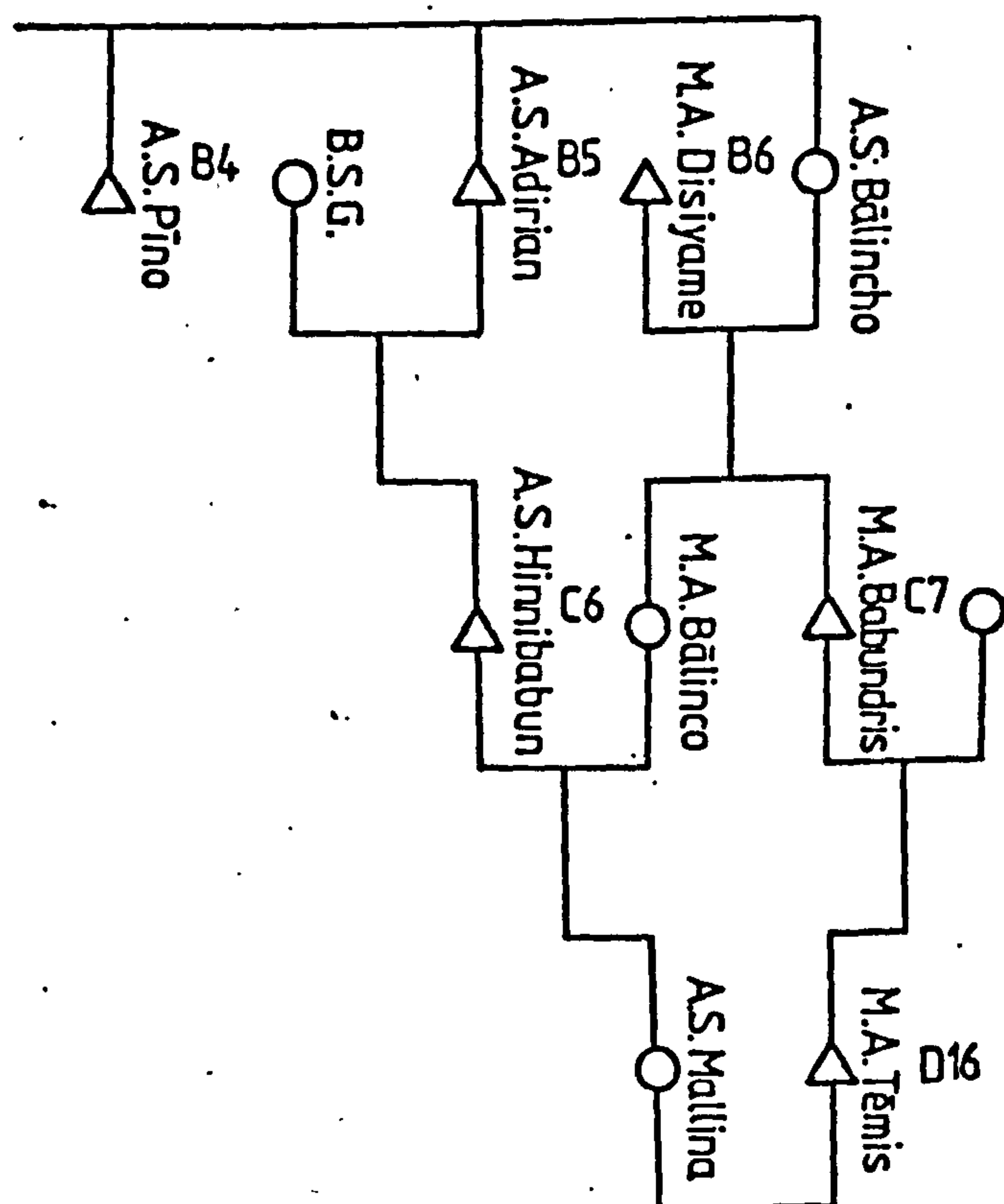


Fig.10 The Inter Marriages of the M.A. & A.S. Lines.



Of the sisters of Hinnibabun, Hencho married B.S.G. Jānis and another married a man from Colombo and after leaving the village was never heard of again. The third sister married M.N. Andris (C5) who came to the village a pauper after being swindled out of his land by a Goyigama farmer. He was remembered in the village as making a living by making fishing nets and coconut spoons which he sold in the bazaar. Despite his poverty Andris was able to secure good marriages for all his children. This was said especially of one son who married a woman from a very artistic family (hungak balasampanna kalā pavula). He left the village to work with his wife's brother who was a temple artist responsible for many major works in temples around Mātale. The other five children of Andris all married people with vāsagama names already existing in the village.

A.S. Hinnibabun had four daughters and only one son which appears to have been an important factor in the break-up of influence of this particular branch of the A.S. line in Beragoda. The marriage of the eldest daughter of Hinnibabun to a temple artist from Galle is of particular importance in this process. The artist, Maligāva Singārakkārāgē Albert was closely related to M. Sarlis the noted Beravā temple artist. Sarlis and Albert were in fact the sons of brothers. The association with the M.S. line appears to have been an enormous boon to the family in that it gave access to the paramparā of temple

art in the M.S. line (see Figure 11). In time both M.N. Somārnīs and A.S. Sianērīs studied under Sarlīs and Albert, their brothers-in-law. Somārnīs is still resident in Beragoda and currently works all over the island and recently worked in India building statues for the Mahā Bodhi society. Sianērīs, however, left the village to reside in his wife's village of Baddevatta where he died at an early age. All subsequent contact with his wife and children were lost.

The fourth daughter of Hinnibabun, Mallina, married her cross-cousin (Mo.Br.So.), Tēmīs (D16), a man skilled in the professions of his father. These skills include astrology, Bali Tovil and Yak Tovil. On account of the patrivirilocal residence (dīga) of her three sisters after marriage and the uxorilocal (binna) residence of her brother, occupation of the paternal residence came to Mallina and Tēmīs upon the death of Hinnibabun.

In this final example I would like to turn to a series of marriages which illustrate clearly the association between alliance and status on the one hand and traditional knowlege and skills on the other. The case commences with the marriage of M.A. Tēmīs' father's sister to a man of the U.G. line. The marriage of M.A. Donī and U.G. Roddē (C8) was the first inter-marriage between the two families. It was said that in order to effect this marriage, U.G. Roddē changed his vāsagama name from that of his father and brothers, which was Maduraccārīgē

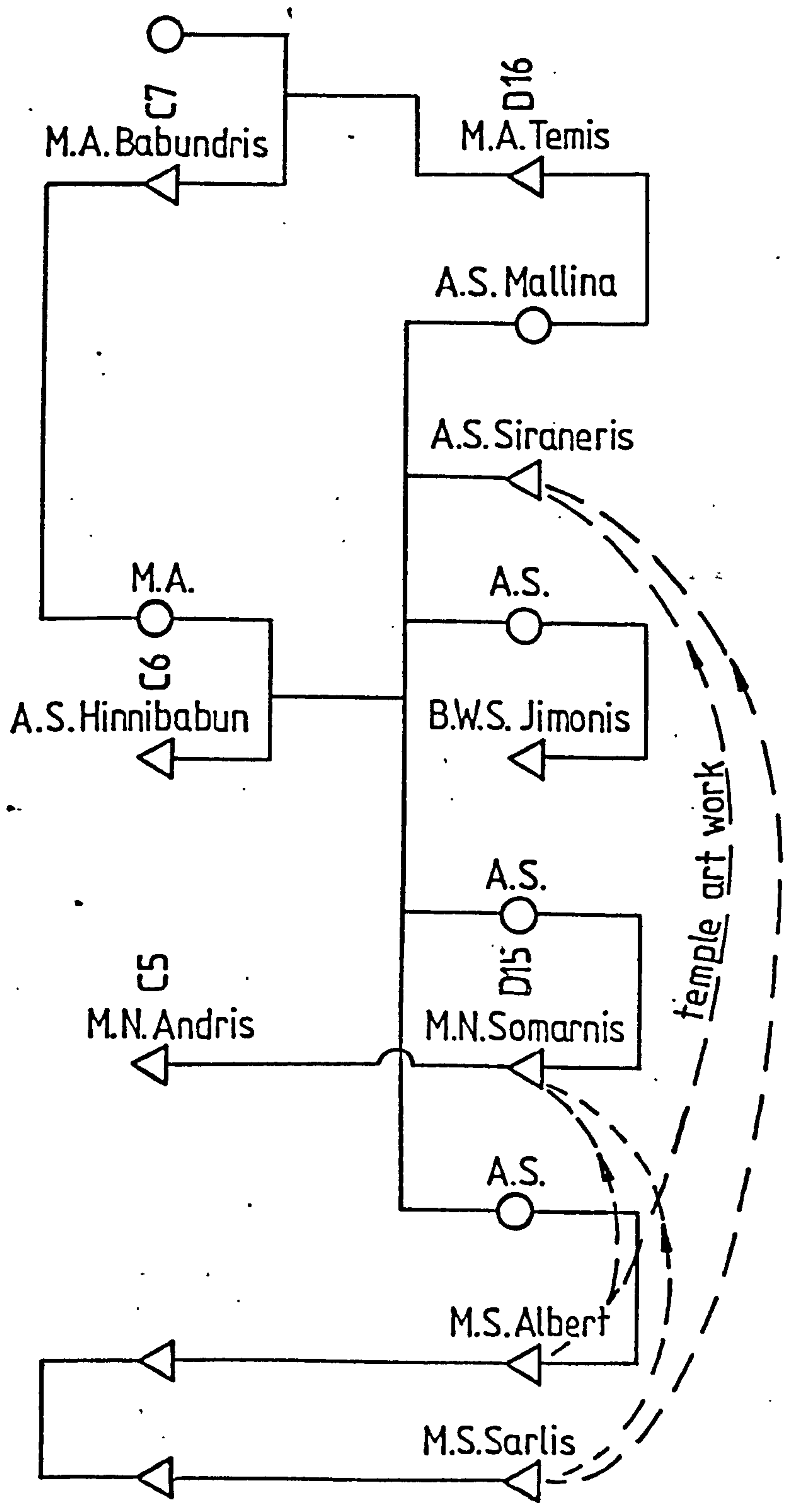


Fig.11 The Daughters of Hinnibabun



to the slightly more prestigious title of Uruvitiya Ganitagē, which associated him with the more esteemed profession of astrology.[6] Subsequent to this change, all of Roddē's descendants and his brothers adopted the new title. Once this link was established the two families remained in close co-operation in work and domestic ritual (eg. pirit) within the village.

In the present generation it was deemed appropriate that the youngest son of Tēmīs, M.A. Midgel (E13) should marry the eldest daughter of U.G. Saradias (D17). At the time of his marriage Midgel was a mason engaged in small house repairs and labouring. Despite studying with his father and brothers, he had failed to take up any of the traditional family pursuits. His marriage to the eldest daughter of Saradias was seen as an equitable continuation of the relationship between the two families. However, an elder brother of Midgel had long desired to marry the youngest daughter of Saradias (see Figure 12). This was a match to which his family were strongly opposed.

Despite their objections, the elder brother, Sirisena (E12), made strong protestations, saying that they were rightful spouses, cross-cousins (nāna-massina) and their horoscopes were highly compatible (being an astrologer he had matched them himself!), but it was to no avail, his parents remained intransigent. After two near fatal attempts at suicide and a deterioration in Sirisena's mental and physical health, his parents were forced to



consent to the union. After the marriage, family relationships remained fraught and the couple took up residence on a tiny plot on the edge of the village well away from the ancestral home. During my stay the couple embarked on the difficult task of living as a household without the support of the husband's family. In spite of frequent outbursts of hostility from other family members there were signs that Sirisena's impetuosity would be forgiven. This was especially so after the birth of their first son.

Even though terminologically correct, Sirisena's parents regarded the marriage as an irresponsible 'love match' and unsuitable for two main reasons. In the first place, it was not thought proper that a man should marry a woman when his younger brother had previously married her elder sister. Secondly, a further marriage into the same family served no purpose, it was of no use (kisima vāḍak nā). Any obligations which there might have been between the two families were satisfied by Midgel's marriage.

Sirisena was by far the most intelligent of his three brothers, having done well at school and studied a variety of traditional skills from his father. His skills included astrology (nakṣāstra and pāḍabāḍīma): recitation, dancing and drumming for exorcism and Bali Tovil (although these were not pursued to a fully performative level). He was also a competent mason and



carpenter and had at various times served apprenticeships as a motor mechanic and photographer's assistant. By his own efforts he had learned the art of writing poetry for magical purposes (set kavi and vas kavi) from a Buddhist priest and also the art of treating snakebites by magic (sarpaya vāḍakama) from an Ayurvedic physician. Sirisena's wide range of skills and his remarkable thirst for knowledge should have rendered him an asset to the family at the time of his marriage. His parents had intended to arrange a marriage with a family of greater repute and saw his marriage with someone from the U.G. line as a pointless step down. At the time of my leaving Sirisena was working as a carpenter, supplementing his income from small-scale healing rites and astrological works, all performed independent of his family.

Many points already made in the previous two examples also emerge in this example. Four points which I would like to draw attention to, however, are as follows: firstly, following the arrival of M.A. Disiyamē (B6) in Beragoda, a series of cross-cousin marriages occurred which consolidated and contained certain knowledge and skills, and thus furthered co-operation . . . between the M.A. and A.S. lines.

Secondly, in addition to the consolidation and containment of knowledge and skills between the M.A. and A.S. lines, other crucial alliances were affirmed by the movement of women. Most important of these were the

marriage of one sister of A.S. Hinnibabun (C6) into the M.N. line and the other into the B.S.G. line (the latter being an ideal cross-cousin marriage). These marriages confirmed and furthered co-operation between male members of these patriline.

Thirdly, this example illustrates once again how the movement of women results in, and may even be the cause of, subsequent teaching relationships and co-operation in work between different families. This can be seen in the marriage of one of A.S. Hinnibabun's daughters to the temple artist M.S. Albert which resulted in the transmission of this particular skill to one of her brothers and to her sister's husband. However, the demographic fact that Hinnibabun had four daughters and only one son produced fruitful alliances but resulted in the effective removal of this branch of the A.S. line from the performing arena. Sianēris, Hinnibabun's only son, in making use of the skills brought within his reach by the marriage of his sister into a strong family of temple artists, terminated Hinnibabun's influence as a teacher and performer in Beragoda. Without sons he was unable to exploit to the full, possibilities which the marriages of his daughters had created.

Finally the example of the M.A. patriline provides us with an illustration of what happens when an intended strategy is not realised. Sirisena's desire to choose his own spouse resulted in what the family perceived as a

waste of resources. Sirisena's refusal to enter a strategic (arranged) marriage and hence a useful partnership for the family almost resulted in him and his wife being ostracised from the M.A. household.

Traditions spiral down through the social structure of the Beravā giving form to relationships through time, bringing together different configurations of kinsmen, actively in the production of corporate performances and passively through alliance and the movement of women.

Out of this process emerge successful performers who are able to command extensive networks of kinsmen, organise troupes, make many pupils and request the teaching services of others. Such men epitomise the traditions of the Beravā and represent critical conjunctions or embodiments of the process whereby traditions are transmitted within the community. Their position is attained by a combination of historical inevitability and skilled manipulation of the resources and relationships they have at their disposal. The examples of the A.S. patriline (3.5.1.) and the B.S.G. patriline (3.5.11) provide us with examples of this process and A.S. Jinōris (D10) and B.S.G. Odiris (E2) provides us with illustrations of the accumulated conjunction of traditions in individuals.

However, the more successful a particular performer becomes the more vulnerable he is to the dispersal of his



accumulated resources when it comes to the question of transmission. The alignment of traditions and relationships which enables a performer to excel in the highly competitive arena of performance cannot easily be passed on to a son whom a father desires to fashion in his own image. There is always the potential threat of dispersal as the configurations of relationship change with each generation. Absence of a son, an excess of daughters (as in the case of Hinnibabun, see page 178) or even too many sons may rapidly erode the illusion of permanence and the notion of traditions continuing along strictly patrilineal lines.

In the next section the nature of the continuity of traditions is examined and in particular the role of marriage in creating their continuity.

### 3.6 Marriage and the continuity of traditions

The effective sub-unit of Sinhalese caste, the marriage-circle or action-set, is the pavula or kindred. This concept has been described by Tambiah as an 'amalgam of two primary fictions' (Tambiah 1965:168). The fictions he refers to are on the one hand the household (gedara), 'agnatically recruited by dīga marriage and tied to a locality by virtue of ancestral property' (ibid). This aspect of the fiction is impossible to realise because of the fission of land resulting from inheritance and the opposition of agnates who compete for resources within the

family group. It is further divided through the claims of women who can potentially contract uxori-local (binna) marriages bringing their husbands in to live and work on the ancestral estate.

The second fiction is that of endogamy, 'marriage between close kin and marriage within a village' (ibid). This aspect of the fiction is a demographic impossibility with fission of property and the search for appropriate marriage partners taking inter-marriage increasingly outside of immediate kin and locality.

The pavula or kindred thus remains a fluid formation, a 'chinese box concept' as Leach (1961:112) calls it, manipulated for political ends and organised around shared economic resources. In circumstances where the estate is substantial both fictions can be approximated to, that is, the identity of the patriline will be strong and women will be brought in to reside in the ancestral home in patrilocal (dīga) marriage. Marriages will be strategically arranged to ensure that property is kept within a close range of kin and hence prevented from dispersing and fragmenting. In such cases the identity of the pavula will approach that of an actual group. Alternatively, in cases where there is little or no property involved, strategic marriages and the question of post-marital residence are of little consequence, given that there is no premium attached to their outcome with respect to resources. In such cases

the concept of gedara is weak and pavula formation is diffuse and ineffective.

The questions which arise from this brief explication of kinship and property transmission are, firstly, how does this situation relate to the data presented above? More important, however, is the question of what we can learn concerning the transmission of traditions, knowledge and skills and their role in the social organisation of the Beravā?

In the answer to the first question we can see that in fact there is a close fit with Tambiah's model and approximations to both the fiction of agnation and that of endogamy are both apparent.

Strong identity in the male line is seen in the concept of gedara, the locus of descent and patrification. In Beragoda there are six main ancestral homes (mula gedara) around which sons and in-marrying kinsmen have built their own homes, forming distinct patrilineal clusters. The agnatic fiction is given further substance through patrilineally transmitted vāsagama names which carry prestige and status within the wider community.

The degree to which a patrilineal ideology is upheld can be further inferred from the following table in which the extent to which the ideal of patrilocal/virilocal marriage is upheld in the Beragoda community is given.



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Table II. Patrilocal/Virilocal Marriage Frequency in Beragoda in present adult and first ascending generations

1. FEMALES MARRYING VIRILOCALLY ( <u>diga</u> )	24
(Of these 24 women, 10 married virilocally within Beragoda whilst the remainder married into 12 different <u>Beravā</u> communities, mostly lying within a twelve mile radius.)	
2. FEMALES BRINGING MALES IN ( <u>binna</u> )	3
3. MALES MARRYING PATRILOCALLY ( <u>diga</u> )	30
(Of these 30 males, 10 took wives from within the village whilst the remainder brought in wives from 10 different communities.)	
4. MALES MARRYING UXORILOCALLY ( <u>binna</u> )	8
5. NEOLOCAL MARRIAGES	3
TOTAL	<u>68</u>

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What is immediately apparent from the figures presented above is the high frequency of patrilocal/virilocal marriage, with 24 out of 27 women leaving their natal homes at marriage. What is perhaps of even more significance is the relatively higher number of women who not only married virilocally but also left Beragoda to reside with their spouses (14/24). The pattern is clearly one which tends towards the movement of women between groupings of a marked agnatic nature. Given this data alone we might be tempted to assume, along with Tambiah, that the movements were taking place between groupings with substantial material backing. It is at this point that an important difference arises: the Beravā could hardly be said to possess substantial material

property, but what they do possess is their traditions, transmissible knowledge and skills, and this I would contend is a crucial component in the maintenance of a strong patrilineal ideology.

In the process of teaching, which is in many ways akin to the process of inheritance, containment of traditional resources within the gedara is effected through a father teaching his own sons, thus keeping skills within the family. However, it is impractical for a man to teach all his children the same thing, for reasons which will readily be apparent, and decisions need to be made concerning the allocation of skills amongst male siblings. One son may be selected as appropriate to succeed his father and acquire in full, knowledge, skills and the position in the community which this makes possible. Other sons are directed into other professions or in some cases alienated from traditional family activities in strategies intended to minimise competition within the gedara, as for example in the case of A.S. Tedaris (E6), page 163 ).

With the necessity to gain access to other types of knowledge and skill than those available within the immediate family, we encounter the second fiction, that of endogamy and the controlled distribution of resources amongst an in-marrying group of kin. The transmission of traditions between families and the kinship relations which make this possible, and indeed inevitable in some

instances, continually gravitate away from the realisation in practice of a strong agnatic group.

One man cannot know everything. Many of the services which the Beravā supply are based on a complex division of labour, and this is especially so in the performance of ritual. A corporate ritual act draws on many types of knowledge and specialisation; dancing, drumming, reciting of poems and esoteric formulae and acting. It is unlikely that a father will be able to supply all these skills to his sons, or alternatively, have enough sons to achieve an effective division of labour within a single agnatic group. To operate successfully in the traditional arena it is essential to maintain and exploit not only relations of descent but also relations of alliance and affinity.

Sons who do not acquire their father's skills must be occupied and given access to skills. The resources which a family possesses must be maximised to ensure success and flexible strategies in the future. Both these objectives are achieved primarily by the movement of women and the mutual ties and obligations they carry with them, providing access to new skills and bringing into close relation men with diverse talents and skills.

Women do not engage in apprenticeship and neither do they produce or perform in any of the traditional arenas. This is not to say, however, that women do not assimilate knowledge from the continual immersion in the affairs of their fathers, husbands and sons, and nor are they



discouraged from such participation. The knowledge they do have is acquired in a passive rather than an active mode; it is not actively sought after and there is no legitimate outlet for it.[7] The distinction between men's work and women's work is relatively clear, falling into the opposition public/visible:private/domestic. Women, however, do play a vital role in the transmission and application of traditional knowledge and skills.

The strongly patrilineal ideology of descent which the transmission of knowledge engenders in the relationship between male teachers and pupils is counter-poised by the invisible claims of women realised on behalf of their brothers and sons. The imparting of knowledge by a man to his son is balanced by the passage of knowledge to a sister's son. In keeping with the ideal of bilateral inheritance this could be viewed as the realisation by a female of a portion of the patrimonial inheritance on behalf of a son, a type of matrilinear inheritance. This can be seen in the teaching relationship which commonly occurs between a māma and his bāna (Mo.Br./Si.So.). The sentiments of this relationship are frequently called upon when resources of knowledge and skill outside of the agnatic group are needed. A boy will go to his mother's brother, which in many cases will be in his mother's natal village, and undergo training with her kinsmen. The movement of women between groups of men with transmissible skills can

form the basis of an ongoing exchange of skills between families. As might be expected, it is the strategic location of women that forms the basis of the pavula among propertied factions within any community. What is interesting here however, is the nature of the property over which control is being maintained. Women by their movement at marriage, and the rights and obligations they carry with them, not only give identity to the fluid concept of pavula, but make possible the very transmission of traditions as a means to livelihood among certain factions within the Beravā community.

This point is further illustrated with respect to the relationship women initiate between their husbands and their brothers. The relationship between brothers-in-law (massina-massina) is a relationship both egalitarian and co-operative and significantly this is the key relationship in the formation of troupes for ritual performance (to be discussed in the following chapter).

Before marriage a man will work closely with his father and unmarried brothers forming the household unit, and in other contexts the agricultural unit (Tambiah 1965:165). Following marriage there is an assumption that the husband will help the wife's people. Such assistance takes many forms and one commonly seen in the data presented above is the provision of teaching to a woman's brothers by her husband, husband's brothers or husband's father (cf. the cases of G.S. Saronelis pp. 159 and M.S.

Albert 178- ). Here, women effect a lateral articulation of knowledge and skills between families, a movement further consolidated in the co-operation of brothers-in-law in joint acts of production and performance.

The dichotomy between the expected orientations of sons and daughters is further illustrated in a statement given by one of Yalman's informants:

"Once my son is married he is no longer mine - finished - no respect! He belongs to the daughter-in-law. He goes in her direction; daughter not like that; much love, who cares if the son-in-law is angry? You have the daughter, she will respect the father!"

(Yalman 1967:270)

Often the assistance given to a wife's people, whatever form it might take, is the cause of conflict within families and in some cases whole villages. The attention paid to a wife's people in the form of gifts, assistance, securing work and providing teaching is often construed negatively by agnatic kinsmen as a neglect for duties and a disregard for priorities, which should ideally centre on the gedara. This is particularly the case where the woman comes from a family with a strong tradition of knowledge and skills, in which case the pull towards her agnatic group is strong. This can be seen in the case of the family of Odiris (see Figure 9, pp. 173) in which three of his sisters married skilled performers who then worked with their brother-in-law and father-in-law in the performance of ritual. The daughter who left the village married B.S. Alson (E1), a balikārayā



who had also been a pupil of her father. Although she lived in his village, he remained in close co-operation with her family in Beragoda. This is hardly surprising given the threefold nature of the connection: marital alliance, apprenticeship and co-operation in performance. In many instances relationships such as these can be traced back over four or five generations, making for complex and densely textured relationships which give patterns of exchange and co-operation in the present a certain inevitability.

As in more conventional contexts, the pavula emerges from relations of alliance and co-operation between propertied factions within the village and also from relations with their equals in other villages. The process of transmitting knowledge and skills within and between families is a crucial component in the formation of factions within the community, and gives substance to the corporate activities upon which the notion of pavula is based.

Before going on to summarise the points made above, I would like to draw attention to an apparent contradiction which emerges from the analysis presented above. For certain people, for example B.S. Alson (E1), it would appear that the twin poles of descent and alliance are at odds. Remembering that the frequency of virilocal residence is high with a relatively higher proportion of these marriages taking place outside the village (see page

190), a paradox is in evidence. On the one hand a husband might reside in his own natal village yet be required to co-operate and assist his wife's people who live in another village. His wife, on the other hand resides in his own village away from her own kinsmen with whom she expects her husband to work.

The immediate inference to be drawn from this is that for those in such established positions as performers, physical mobility is high. Unlike land, which provides a material focus for group formation and co-operation, knowledge and skill can be activated at any time and any place. The performance of a large ritual often brings together kinsmen from four or five different villages. The groups are fluid, with kinsmen working together periodically to satisfy mutual obligations. More successful performers operate in wider networks of kinsmen which often involves them in travelling extensively over the area. In the early days of my fieldwork I had great difficulty in getting to meet many of my informants on account of the fact that their lifestyle was not only nocturnal but also totally itinerant.

In the arguments presented above we have traversed from strategies of extreme containment of knowledge and skill inherent in the principles of agnation, to the possibility of extreme dispersal in the form of alliance and the claims a woman makes on behalf of her brothers and sons. I would like to conclude this section by

summarising some of the key principles out of which the pavula emerges as a fluid grouping, manipulated for political ends and organised in part around the shared resource of knowledge and skill, and the productions and performance this makes possible.

1) Residence: Residence plots and the houses which stand on them form the locus of agnation, the gedara. Usually occupied by a group of male siblings and their wives, the gedara traces identity back to a founding ancestor, the first migrant. Vāsagama names often indicate the village of origin of the original migrant and are passed down patrilineally by members of the gedara. These names also carry connotations of prestige and status within the wider community. Chains of transmission (paramparāva) are reckoned in the male line with one or two sons in each generation taking up the traditional family occupation.

2) Intra-village ties: The six key patrilineal or gedera (see Figure 3, page 86), are closely inter-related over four generations since the founding of the village. Inter-marriage, exchange of knowledge and skills, and co-operation in work, forms the core of the pavula in the village. The close-knit core of inter-marrying and co-operating kinsmen also provides Beragoda with its identity as a centre where traditional arts and skills are still to be found. However, despite



the tendency to village endogamy and strategies of containment seen in cross-cousin marriage and the reproduction of marriage patterns across generations, neither endogamy nor complete containment of knowledge and skills within the village can be completely realised.

3) Inter-village ties: In the first place demographic factors inevitably take the search for marriage partners outside of the immediate locality. The net must be cast wider if suitable marriage partners are to be found for all members of the village. Marriages which take place outside the village, however, are rarely arbitrary and mostly take place with communities in fairly close proximity (within a twelve mile radius) and with which some prior connection exists. The connection might be an earlier migration to or from the village, an earlier inter-marriage or some earlier teaching relationship between members of the different communities. Whatever form the connections might take, their maintenance over time through exchange, co-operation and assistance opens up a wider marriage circle which in itself tends towards endogamy. The circle can never be closed, however, and endogamy must remain a tendency rather than a principle founded upon some tangible social group.

Finally, inter-marriage between different villages serves to provide access to new skills through apprenticeship to kinsmen of different occupations and can also serve to bring into co-operation important

kinsmen from different villages.

With inter-village ties we arrive at a notion of pavula which transcends a single locality and in which kinsmen from several different villages, united by ties of alliance, enter into relations of co-operation and exchange in the arena of traditional knowledge and skills.

### 3.7 Conclusion: Tradition and secrecy

It is often said of the Beravā that they are one of the few groups within Sinhalese society to maintain a strong caste identity. In the first place, this is undoubtedly due to the fact that they are one of the few castes to have kept many of their caste specific occupations and occupational ties. However, in the light of the evidence presented above it is possible to go beyond this in asserting that their distinctive social identity arises and is maintained not only because they do 'traditional' things, but also from the way they come to do them.

The knowledge and skills which enable the Beravā to carry out their many traditional activities, are possessed and controlled by individuals and families within the caste. They are passed on through apprenticeship, an essentially social relationship whereby one person spends time teaching another person (usually younger) by instruction, demonstration, illustration and repetition. The relationship is fundamentally a qualitative one in

which the teacher seeks to impart the lessons of his accumulated experience and the accumulated experience before that, as well as more pedestrian repertoires of facts, details and techniques. The teacher attempts to reproduce and reduplicate, to the extent he thinks fit and appropriate, his own image, identity and ability, in another person.

In this respect the relationship between a teacher and his pupil is a relationship of enormous power because it provides legitimate access to the past, to 'pastness', which is itself powerful and imbued with a certain sacrality. A teacher opens a particular window on people, places and events formerly existent and gives the possibility of a meaningful connection with them. This is seen most clearly with respect to ritual, dealt with in more detail in subsequent chapters, in which events that took place in the past are enacted in the present, such that the power to heal, bless, curse or whatever is made to flood into the present with the same effects: 'because then... therefore now'.

The authority and legitimacy of performers in respect of their ritual powers is closely bound up with the nature of the relationships they trace with their own past, their paramparā or pedigrees. Traditions are transmitted within the logic of the kinship system and families with greater access ensure consolidation of their resources by maintaining strategies of close kin marriage and



alienating kinsmen surplus to requirements into other areas of specialisation. The ties a man has with the past are valued, romanticised, idealised and even fabricated in the structuring of traditional knowledge and skills in the present.

This latter point raises the important question of the esoteric nature of the knowledge upon which many of the ritual acts which the Beravā perform are based. The secrecy which surrounds the transmission of knowledge and skills associated with ritual is an important source of their power and mystique in society. As Barth suggests in his epistemology of secrecy for Baktaman knowledge, the value of information is inversely proportional to the number who share it (Barth 1975:217). Although among the Beravā, secrecy, possessiveness, exclusion and even deceit are often explained as devices to ensure that outsiders do not get hold of knowledge and skills traditional to the caste, it is apparent that it is equally the case that such attitudes are directed at factions within the caste. Performers must protect themselves and their integrity as performers not from outside threats but from their competitors within the caste. In my experience, people outside the caste were not much interested in the finer points of Beravā ritual anyway. In much the same way as in any society with a complex division of labour, one is quite prepared to call on the services of a specialist, but not necessarily motivated to know how the

specialist achieves his or her results, as long as they are achieved. Secrecy and possessiveness in the transmission of tradition serves as a vital component in the maintenance of position and reputation between different groups of performers, fragmenting tradition and the portions of knowledge and skill from which it is comprised.

The reluctant transmission or retention of certain pieces of knowledge and information in the interests of personal position and status has a number of important consequences for the transmission of traditions and their perception as Tradition. For example, if we look at the enormous variety of ritual styles, techniques and applications which exist in the South of Sri Lanka today, against a back drop of competition, secrecy and fiercely maintained hierarchies, then such proliferation begins to make sense. The allotment and appropriation of different bits of knowledge continually fragments tradition. Alliance and the exchange of knowledge counteracts the strongly centripetal tendencies to contain traditions within an agnatic group. Within this process the traditions which underlie ritual performances are continually manipulated, given the stamp of individuality of their transmitters and over generations brought together in ever new combinations and juxtapositions. For the wider society the dynamic transmission of traditions among the Beravā provides a rich and highly flexible repertoire of ritual and symbolic forms. In response to,

or in anticipation of, changes in the wider society, techniques, beliefs, and metaphorical complexes might fall into disuse, while others come to gain import and resonance as the components of Tradition change configuration like the shapes in a kaleidoscope. As the example of mask-making discussed in Chapter 8 illustrates, the process of transmission of traditions is a highly creative process which takes us to the heart of what we might call social change.

From the point of view of the overall Tradition, however, tendencies to fragmentation at the local level are masked by tendencies to integration at higher levels. In practice, knowledge and skills inevitably overlap and feed off one another in a flux of images, ideas and practical techniques transmitted as part of a tightly knit social organisation. Dancers build houses, drummers diagnose illnesses, exorcists work as carpenters with a versatility and adaptability which makes the community a crucial asset within the wider society. What the Beravā do and how they come to do it, implies that Tradition persists as a whole in transmission. Like the viewing of a pointillist painting, however, it is distance, in this case social distance which introduces order and pattern to the patchwork of ideas, beliefs, specialisations, skill, dexterity and technical mastery which are subsumed under the collective noun: Tradition.



It has been my aim in this Chapter to understand the ideas, values, and proceses which underlie the transmission of traditions in the form of knowledge and skills amongst certain sectors of the Beravā community. Pursuing an analogy between the transmission of property and the transmission of knowledge and skills I have attempted to locate certain traditions within a wider ideology of kinship and marriage and to illustrate how access to these traditions and the possibilities this creates, are socially mediated. From this we can derive a deeper understanding of the ways in which traditions are transmitted within the caste and thus gain further insight into the sources of the strong identity and mystical power which the Beravā have in the wider society.

It now remains to illustrate the way in which traditional knowledge and skills are brought into relation with the wider society via the ritual productions and performances it makes possible for the Beravā.

### Notes to Chapter 3

[1] The 'Vadan Kavi Pota' is a fifteenth century poem which extols the value of learning as an investment for future benefits. The first part of the poem deals in detail with the Sinhalese alphabet, elementary phonetics and the classification of letters. The poem was used extensively as a language and reading primer by many of my older informants although now it is virtually obsolete. It is interesting to note in this respect that literacy (and numeracy) are essential prerequisites for many of the skills transmitted within the caste.

[2] The voluminous literature on genealogies and their manipulation in British anthropology is a case in point

(eg. Evans-Pritchard 1940:199 and Bohannan 1952).

[3] Originally members of the lower castes were debarred from having tiled roofs and only permitted to erect semi-permanent coconut thatch roofs. The question of who actually had the first tiled roof in Beragoda is still a point of controversy. Some say it was a brother-in-law of Janis in 1899.

[4] Jānis's association with the Columbo printing press is of further note given the tide of Buddhist nationalism which was welling up at the turn of the century in the Southern Province. The image of Jānis as the dharmīṣṭa man is consistent with the radical puritanism which marked the early expressions of the independence movement.

[5] Although the name of Janis's mother's brother was lost, his vāsagama name was still remembered: The title indicated high achievements in the practice of astrology by an ancestor. The title was Siri Jayalat Jotiratana Liyana Ganitagē, which loosely translated gives, 'Blessed and Victorious, Writing and Calculating Astrologer'.

[6] The suffix -acārigē is quite common in Beravā vāsagama names and is often associated with more menial and low status professions such as smithying. On one occasion a man whose name contained the -acārigē suffix gave his name as Ediriārracigē, a subtle name change to one denoting village headship or least hereditary high status.

[7] I was told the story of a woman who upon hearing that her husband had failed to attend a gam maḍuva, took his drum and to everybody's amazement was able to drum the correct rhythms for the entire ritual. In return for this remarkable effort the woman in the story was given lands.

In the domestic context I have seen women help out their husbands when they get stuck with particular recitations. Women also perform small healing rites (tel mātrīma).

[8] Young women who have married into the community are identified in reference by their natal villages, for example, 'Akurugoda nangi' literally 'little sister from Akurugoda' refers to a woman married virilocally (dīga) into Beragoda.





Plate IV. A troupe of exorcists assemble at the beginning of a Mahā Sohōna Samayama.



## CHAPTER 4

## THE APPLICATION AND ORGANISATION OF RITUAL:

## A DEVILISH BUSINESS

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we examined the notion of traditions and looked at the way in which such traditions are passed down amongst certain factions within the community and fulfil a number of important ideological functions. Central to this discussion was the role of traditions (paramparāva) in the internal organisation of the Beravā and their perceptions as Tradition by the wider Sinhalese society. In this Chapter I turn to the more practical question of how the diversified knowledge and skills, practised by various persons within the community and transmitted as traditions, are brought together to produce complex ritual events which give the Beravā their Traditional role in Sinhalese society. In this respect it is the particular role of the Beravā to furnish society with a means to repel the attention of demons and

subjugate the manifold malign forces which in Sinhalese cosmology ever threaten to reduce order to chaos.

In this chapter the organisation of various rituals performed by the Beravā will be examined and the express purpose of their performance analysed. This will be followed by an attempt to explain the relationship between the formal structures of the rituals and their content, examining the social position and identity of those most closely associated with their production. In the final section of the chapter the recruitment and organisation of the various personnel required for the performance of these rituals is elaborated.

Before addressing these issues, it is necessary first to look at the domains in which the specialist knowledge of the Beravā is applied and at the modes of transforming their knowledge into action.

#### 4.2 Ritual specialisation: the domain of the Beravā

The control that certain members of the Beravā community have over the transmission and ownership of ritual knowledge and skills gives them a virtual monopoly over a highly specialist realm of healing and curing. However, as well as competing amongst themselves for business and the application of the same types of cure, they also compete with a wide range of other specialists, who also claim efficacy for their cures in the anomalous category of supernaturally originated sickness and

disorder.

Faced with a non-ordinary disorder for which none of the conventional explanations suffice, a person can engage an extensive and often bizarre range of specialists each with their highly individual methods, techniques, potions and recommendations. Gem-diviners, seers (anjanamkārayā), the seth kavi specialists who cure by the magical use of poetry (see Hodge 1981:305-318), the men with undivulged skills in the use of yantra and mantra, the self-styled 'philologist' of Akuressa who cures by the manipulation of sound (śabda śāstra), to name but a few, all contribute to the bewildering array of courses of action and possible solutions to problems.

As one early commentator, speaking of the Sinhalese, put it: 'he has one religion for his soul, and another for his body' (De Silva Gooneratne 1865, 66:7), and broadly speaking the types of action referred to above fall into the latter category: they are religions of the body. They seek to locate immediate causes of suffering and to offer immediate solutions; they have little to do with wider questions of merit, rebirth, salvation or spiritual development, which is the preserve of Buddhism proper and thus under the protection and supervision of the priesthood, the sangha. This opposition is one which has been broadly upheld by many more recent commentators on Sinhalese religion (Ames 1962 and 1966; Obeyesekere 1963:151-152; Yalman 1964:119) and it points to a



fundamental division of labour in Sinhalese religion and ritual.

The Beravā are crucial if we are to understand how this division of labour works in practice, for, as we saw in chapter one, the Beravā are the people historically associated and identified with the control of the supernatural for this-worldly ends. They have long been in command of the traditions of exorcism and healing and as such are in part responsible for the 'exuberant proliferation of the supernatural ideology of the Sinhalese' (Yalman 1964:117). They have been the carriers and the generators of many of the complex ideas and beliefs which give the Sinhalese such a rich and variegated culture.

The energies of the Beravā as directed towards the identification, propitiation, appeasement and expulsion of the agents of disorder and affliction, provide short-term relief and consolation in the face of intractable suffering. In this respect they are diametrically opposed to the orientations of the priesthood which should ideally revolve around questions of ultimate salvation through adherence to the precepts and teachings of the Buddha. This dual orientation is perhaps nowhere more clearly summarised than in the opposition between the Buddhist priest and the exorcist (cf. Tambiah 1970 :322). The priest, shaven headed and clad in his orange robes, should exemplify the control and mindfulness laid out in

the scriptures. The exorcist (Īdurā) on the other hand typically has long flowing locks and dances in costumes of red, white and black. Far from control and mindfulness his idiom is often one of ecstasy and 'mindlessness'. The priest symbolises death and moves towards the ultimate dissolution of the self through the analytical insights of meditation. The exorcist expresses life and movement and through his rituals affirms the self, re-centres it and makes it whole. Ames (1962:79) catches this idea quite succinctly when, speaking of healing rituals, he states that:

'They turn sick Buddhists (ones belaboured by wordly desires) into healthy Buddhists (ones who can transcend these worldly interests).'

The interdependence of these two distinct realms of action and discourse is realised when it is remembered that, almost without exception, my exorcist informants were all 'healthy Buddhists', that is, ones with a clear perception of the centrality of the Buddha and his teachings to their lives.

Although the realms of action of the priest and the exorcist are clearly interdependent, they are kept distinct by a powerful structural logic. The maintenance of this underlying logic in practice is seen in the instances where the different contexts overlap, as when priests become possessed. Ames (ibid:78) provides us with the example of a priest disrobing in order to undergo an

exorcism ceremony, after which he returned to his monastic order. One of my own informants spoke of a temple near Hambantota which catered for possessed priests who came from far and wide to have exorcisms clandestinely performed in the temple grounds. The whole business was clearly a bit irregular as far as my informant was concerned and it was unlikely that, outside a few priests and the exorcists who regularly performed there, many people had any awareness of the service which the temple provided.

Although the priest and the exorcist can in many ways be seen as structurally opposed with respect to the society they serve, they also share certain structural properties. For example, both have special relationships with their teachers and recognise chains of transmission which authenticate and legitimate position and status for present day exponents. Furthermore, a very common teaching relationship or relationship of pupillary succession, is that between a monk and his nephew (Mo.Br./Si.So.) (cf. Malalgoda 1976:52n), somewhat echoing the matrilinear descent implied in succession between males in the previous chapter (page 193).

A second important similarity revolves around the use of language and the power which accrues from the use of non-ordinary languages and linguistic forms (cf. Tambiah 1968). The priest resorts to the sacred language of Pali to teach morality and invoke blessing; the



exorcist in a similar vein uses Sanskrit and hybrid languages in his poems and chants to subjugate and expel malign demons and spirits. He is, in Tambiah's words, acting as a 'mock monk' (1970:322). Language and the question of how words come to achieve their potency in performance will be taken up in Chapter 7.

Thirdly, both bodies of specialists have a broadly similar relationship with the wider society. Each in their own way exhibit the classic features of 'outsiderhood' (Turner 1974:233), they stand outside the dominant structural relationships of Sinhalese society. One is invested with a positive identity as the carrier and protector of the teachings of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and given institutional recognition in the priesthood, the Sangha. Ideally they should practise a lifestyle which tends towards austerity and self-cultivation which sets them apart from or above the mundane (laukika) flow of everyday life. The exorcist on the other hand is given negative identity as the person who confronts and controls the negative forces at work in the cosmos. His 'outsiderhood' does not arise from codes which relate primarily to the body and its control but from prohibitions and restrictions expressed in the social idiom of caste which still persists strongly where the Beravā are concerned.

'Outsiderhood' for the Beravā is created and maintained by the social exclusion and discrimination

which the caste system engenders, but is also given an internal dynamic as a result of the knowledge and skills over which individuals and families within the caste exercise control. Containment and manipulation of certain traditions, often expressed publicly as secrecy, serve to further set the Beravā apart from the society in the midst of which they move: they know, or are believed to know, things that other people do not. The powers which the Beravā have traditionally invoked must necessarily be hedged and bounded by strictures imposed from without, but esotericism and mystification, generated from within, play their part, as, for reasons of economics, prestige, status and identity within the caste, traditions are manipulated in their transmission and utilisation.

From the interplay between processes external to the caste and over which the Beravā have little control, and dynamics internal to the caste over which they are able to maintain a degree of control, arises a powerful resonance when it comes to the ritual treatment of individual and temporal interests, this is particularly the case when such interests are expressed in the idiom of possession, misfortune, or irrational affliction. The negative outsiderhood of the Beravā, and the strong occupational identity attached to their outsiderhood, provides society with a series of ritual contexts for dealing with disorder as and when it is experienced by members of the wider society.

A breakdown in the order of day to day experience is nowhere more clearly expressed than in situations where illness and misfortune predominate over what is considered to be the normal state. Here the disjunction between language and experience is at its greatest and the desire to encompass extra-ordinary experience in some objective discourse most keenly felt. To understand the cause of personal suffering, however irrational it might be to non-sufferers, is a significant step towards a resolution and a cure. As Bourdieu puts it:

"'Private' experiences undergo nothing less than a change of state when they recognise themselves in the public objectivity of an already constituted discourse."

(Bourdieu 1977:170)

It is the practical mastery that the Beravā have over the traditions of exorcism and healing which provide them with an 'already constituted discourse' legitimated by its origination in the past.

Its activation and enactment in ritual provides an authorised context within which problems and disorders can be located and identified, thus giving form to experience and objectifying inchoate feelings (cf. Fernandez 1974:132). As Kapferer has illustrated in his forthcoming book which makes fascinating use of the phenomenology of G.H. Mead and draws on his earlier experience in the Manchester School (cf. Victor Turner's early work), rituals of exorcism and healing transform physical and psychological sickness to health, but also effect a social



re-integration whereby the public revelation, recognition and removal of the source of a person's affliction can act to crystallise and heal social schisms.

In realising this transformation the particular social position of the Beravā is crucial. As outsiders they can absorb onto themselves the negative effects which arise from disorder in the day to day structure of experience with least consequence for that structure. Outsiderhood gives them capacities to comment on and question shrewdly the whole normative order of the society which they serve, yet from which they are largely excluded, bringing to mind Turner's account of Muchona the Hornet:

'In a ritual context he could set himself apart from the battles for prestige and power that bedevil kinship and village relationships in Ndembu society...Muchona's very weakness and vulnerability in village life were transmuted into virtues where the maintenance of the total society was concerned.'

(Turner 1967:146)

The rituals of the Beravā create a set of elaborate contexts which give systematic expression to a whole gamut of extra-ordinary experience.

In their performances they create a theatrical world, a world of spectacle, an extra-ordinary reality, in which the patient is transported out of mundane reality, into a realm of paradox and inversion, where the sensory elaboration of metaphor and symbol make subtle play on the emotions and perceptions of patient and audience alike.

thus, offering the means of achieving a meaningful transformation of illness and disorder to health, order and social integration.

#### 4.3 Rituals of exorcism and healing performed by the Beravā [1]

The rituals performed by the Beravā can be conveniently broken down into five main classificatory headings:

- 1) The Mahā Sohōna Samayama (including the Iramudun Samayama). [2]
- 2) The Raṭa Yakkuma. [3]
- 3) The Sanni Yakkuma. [4]
- 4) The Suniyam or Huniyam. [5]
- 5) The Bali Tovil. (To be discussed in detail in following chapter.)

Accounts of these rituals, their style, content and orientations, are given in Appendix I at the end of the thesis. Pressure on space prevents me entering into the particular complexities of these rituals other than in a general way based on personal observations. It is hoped that such descriptions, in addition to providing further contextual detail to the arguments presented, will provide useful comparative material for future workers in this field.

The rituals described are highly complex events using colour, costume, dance, rhythm, song, spatial organisation

and an elaborate system of offerings to achieve their effects. It is thus not surprising that each category could easily be the subject of a whole volume, as is the Mahā Sohōna Samayama in the cases of Egan (1969) and Kapferer in his forthcoming monograph.

The variations within these five categories are considerable, with techniques and beliefs varying from region to region. In the lower orders of the cosmos, the domain in which these rituals seek to have most effect, the agents of misfortune are legion and in consequence the methods and means to overcome these forces are similarly diverse. Variation is rife and contradiction between those whose vocation it is to encounter these forces is not uncommon. The classification of ritual types presented above is by no means all inclusive but serves as a shorthand for the main types of ritual practised.

In each of the categories listed above can be placed a wide variety of rituals which are easily identified by virtue of their style, content and orientation. However, although there are key elements and phases which identify certain rituals, a good deal of time is spent carrying out actions which are common to all. Such actions are drawn from a wider, shared ritual repertoire or vocabulary, and are used in similar contexts in wholly different rituals. For example, torches (pandam), tumeric water (kahadiya) and limes (dehi) occur in nearly all Sinhalese healing rituals in conjunction with certain



actions and recitations. In each case they are used as agents of purification, rendering a person or place unattractive to demons or spirits.

This aspect of healing rituals was given careful attention by Egan (1969: Chapter 5) in which he advocated the construction of a 'ritual thesaurus' based on 'common purpose' and 'common attribute' of the massive array of symbols and signs which figure throughout these rituals. Tambiah (1981:144) also speaks of exorcism ceremonies being composed of 'similar sequences and subsequences' and as having 'similar syntagmatic chains'.

As the rituals which comprise the categories listed above are composites, consisting of elements and actions both particular and general, they can be augmented and reduced in size with considerable flexibility. Scale and elaboration of the various episodes and actions which comprise the ritual can be adjusted to meet the occasion. A patron will usually end up paying for the size of ritual he can afford (or ill afford) with the organisers making adjustments in terms of personnel and length of ritual as they go. The question of the size of rituals performed in relation to their efficacy will be taken up in more detail in a later section.

All the rituals mentioned above, with the exception of the Iramudum Samayama are performed during the hours of darkness and their duration is reckoned in traditional time scales. The length of the rituals is measured in

Sinhalese hours (pāya) each of which is twenty-four minutes. The rituals are further structured in terms of 'watches' or yāma, with the three night watches as follows: the evening watch (hānda samayama) from 6.00 p.m. until 10.00 p.m.; the great or middle watch (mahā or māda samayama) lasts from 10.00 p.m. until 2.00 a.m. and finally the new watch (alu yāma) lasts from 2.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m. Each watch lasts approximately 10 Sinhalese hours and in most rituals provides an important guide to the unfolding of the ritual's structure and content.

Each of the rituals are performed at the house of the patron, usually within the domestic compound close to the house. The performers arrive on the day before the ritual is to take place and set about their preparations, out of which they conjure the arena in which their ritual drama will, for one night, be enacted.

It is not uncommon for performers to travel many miles in order to carry out a performance and to be kept travelling in order to fulfill subsequent venues. The record for the performance of consecutive tovil was held by one man who had 'broken rest' (nidi māruva) for sixteen nights, that is, went without proper sleep or rest for sixteen days and nights. I once did it for two nights and took a week to recover!

#### 4.4 Diagnosis and augury

Preparations for each of the rituals mentioned above are initiated by contact between a representative of the sick person, usually a close relative, and the specialist. In most rural areas the astrologer, the exorcist, the charmer etc. are all known, either personally or by reputation and their place of residence can soon be found. Some ambitious specialists advertise in local papers and have business cards and headed stationery for correspondence with clients. In Beragoda many of the key specialists were well known over an extensive area, their reputations building on those of their fathers and grandfathers who also practised in the area. This latter point was made on a number of occasions by families for whom the Beravā performed rituals, emphasising (possibly for my benefit) the long and amicable relations that existed between families of different castes.

The ritual services of the Beravā are generally sought after simpler and cheaper attempts to identify and relieve a disorder have failed. When disorders and ailments cease to be straightforward and are marked by uncommon events and misfortunes, it is likely that the possibility of supernatural causation will be suspected. In the first instance a classification is made by the patient and his or her kin in that they make the decision to refer a disorder to this or that context. Clients have an expectation of what can be done through, for example, exorcism, and have their own typologies of disorder which



enable them to recognise symptoms and characteristics as well as their possible origination.

For most Sinhalese, diet, ailment and attention to correct procedure are daily topics of conversation because they are all potential sources of imbalance in the body, and thus have to be carefully monitored and checked by a host of minor restrictions, observations and folk exegeses. Keen awareness of the mental and physiological balance necessary for a healthy body makes the interpretation and classification of disorders something of a national pastime.

Exorcists, not surprisingly, have their own classifications of the disorders they are faced with. In one elegantly simple classification of all the disorders suffered by Sinhalese people, one exorcist suggested that a quarter could be cured by traditional medicine (āyurveda), a quarter by western medicine, a quarter by exorcism, 'the science of spirits' (bhūtaṭṭi) and one quarter are incurable.

The three major spheres mentioned above are by no means mutually exclusive. Different types of cures may be sought after at the same time or in sequence. They are not necessarily incompatible but often reinforce one another. This is particularly so with respect to Ayurvedic medicine and Bhūtaṭṭi, indeed the latter is considered in some classic medical texts to be one of the eight branches of Āyurveda (Obeyesekere 1976:204).

However, there is a division of labour with respect to the types of condition treated, a division acknowledged by both specialists and clients alike.

When exorcists undertake a diagnosis, they have at their command an extensive range of techniques and classifications which enable them to establish the precise causality of the condition. Some exorcists claim they can discern a great deal about the nature of the patient's illness (āturayā rōga) from the person who brings the message informing him of the disorder. The direction from which the messenger comes, his time of arrival, his first words, the way the message is delivered, can all serve as signs (lakṣana) of what will eventually come to pass. The patient's kin will give their account of the patient's disorder and try to arrange for the ādurā to visit the patient, no doubt emphasising the urgency and seriousness of their case.[6] If the ādurā feels he can help then he agrees to give his full co-operation, but it is unlikely that once having been approached with the possibility of some work the ādurā will turn someone away.

When an ādurā meets his patient, he looks for tell-tale signs of the work of particular demons. These are known from the extensive repertoire of diagnostic poems which give accounts of the kinds of ailments caused by particular demons. For example, in the case of the Sanni Yakka:

'aṅga rudā karamin sita āṅga sitala karavannē  
 van ansē geḍi haṭage bubulu damā ginigannē  
 nissema āṅga vēvelā āṅga ātulen una gannē  
 Sanni yakkugē leḍa kīvot ē hātimayi dānagannē

Pain in one side makes the body cold,  
 boils are burning and blistering on the left,  
 the body shakes continually and fever comes  
 from within,  
 know these are the diseases of the Sanni Yakka.

Physical manifestations of the disorder are examined carefully for what they might reveal about the internal state of the body, notably the state of the three humours, wind (vāta), bile (pīta) and phlegm (sema), known as tun dosa. Agitation and consequent imbalance of the three humours (tun dos kopa) can be the result of malign attention of demons who each favour particular humours or combinations of humours. For example, Mahā Sohōna typically affects the wind humour, whilst the Sanni Yakka favours principally that of phlegm.

The patient will further be questioned with regard to the onset and development of the condition. In such discussions it is usual for the patient's family to become involved as a complex aetiology is put together; a retrospective reconstruction which renders the condition meaningful (cf. Kapferer 1979:111-116). In cases of serious possession, the patient, referred to as a pissek, will enter into a trance under the guidance of the ādura. In such cases it is not uncommon for the demon speaking through the patient to reveal its identity, the nature of the ills it is causing and to specify the



types of offering to be made in order to satisfy its needs.

In cases where the afflicting agents cannot for some reason be precisely ascertained, an Ādurā may resort to different methods of augury to identify the source of the disorder. The methods used vary considerably from area to area and from individual to individual. One method commonly used in the Akuressa area was that of a rice-boiling-augury (batak uyanavā) in which the patient puts a handful of rice into a pot which is then boiled. The Ādurā then examines the marks as the water boils and bubbles through the expanded rice. If, for example, the surface of the rice splits in a line across the middle then the work of Mahā Sohōna is present. Other forms of augury include the examination of betel leaves, the flotation of limes (cf. Egan 1969:5.8), the wrapping of charmed strips of young coconut around the abdomen of the patient to see if they change length. (Wirz 1954:14) etc.

Once the source of the disorder is satisfactorily located the Ādurā will suggest appropriate courses of action to those responsible for the patient. In minor cases the Ādurā might there and then perform a small offering (pīdēniya) or apply some charmed oil (tel mātirīma) to an afflicted part of the body. If more substantial action is advocated then a conditional or pledge thread is tied (Āpa nūla bāndīma). The thread, charmed and tied round the neck, arm or abdomen, is a

contractual agreement made between the exorcist and the afflicting demons that within a specified period offerings will be made providing they desist. When the thread is tied the ḍdurā also enters into an agreement with his client whereby he agrees to take responsibility for the return of the patient to good health (sanīpa karala hāra denavā).

The point of agreement between patient and ḍdurā (and demons in the case of exorcism) marks a critical point in the development of ritual proceedings. It marks the focussing of attention on the patient and initiates the process which will culminate in the uniqueness of personal suffering being framed and given meaning within a wider cosmic order. Ritual is the means whereby this process is realised. From the time the agreement is made, which incidentally carries the sense of a promise or vow (bāraya), the construction and creation of a ritual context gathers momentum for patient, patrons and exorcists alike. The success or failure of a healing ritual is based on far more than just the events which take place during the ritual's performance but is also dependent on processes initiated days, weeks or even months before.

#### 4.5 The pragmatics of ritual: ritual size and efficacy

In the 1979 Radcliffe-Brown Lecture, Tambiah (1981) attempted to deal with the thorny question of the duality

of ritual. On the one hand ritual is understood as a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication linked to cosmological and ideological constructs. This aspect of ritual points to the study of ritual as a prescribed and invariant form. The form can be understood by unpacking the symbolic and semantic structures of which the ritual is composed and studying the various styles in which they are communicated. On the other hand, however, Tambiah draws attention to the contextual dimensions of ritual. However formalised and prescribed a ritual might be, it is always linked in some way to the claims and interests of the participants in terms of status, power and prestige. The ideally invariant form of ritual will always be at odds with its unique realisations in terms of time, place and participants. It was this disjunction between form and content that Tambiah sought to marry together in what he outlined as a 'performative approach to ritual'. The bridge which he placed between the symbolic and the pragmatic were the concepts of indexical symbols and indexical icons which he claimed:

'...will enable us to appreciate how important parts of a ritual enactment have a symbolic or iconic meaning associated with the cosmological plane of content, and at the same time, how those same parts are existentially or indexically related to participants in the ritual, creating, affirming, or legitimating their social positions and powers. The duality thus points in two directions at once... the semantic direction of cultural presuppositions and conventional understandings and in the pragmatic direction of the social and inter-personal context of ritual action, line-up of the participants and the



process by which they infer meanings.'  
(Tambiah 1981:154)

To understand how, in performance, the rituals which the Beravā provide, achieve their potency and efficacy, we too must consider the overlap between the formal characteristics of ritual and the social context in which it is realised in any one instance. As a prelude to examining the cultural and communicative properties of a single ritual complex (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) I would like to look at some of the more pragmatic aspects of the performance of rituals of exorcism and healing.

Once the decision to hold a ritual is made, the responsibility for the bulk of the organisation falls on the patient's family. The performers to a great extent simply give their requirements for materials to the family involved and then show up on the appointed day expecting all to be ready. A host family will be expected to provide seating and shelter for guests, provide food for guests and performers and provide materials for the performers. These aspects of the ritual are non-specialist but no less important because they are one of the ways in which the cure of a single individual is placed in a far wider social context; they are one of Tambiah's 'indexical aspects' of ritual. Private relief of an afflicted individual is also a publicly witnessed event at which critical eyes can be cast onto more than just the events taking place in the arena. It is in the interests of the hosts to ensure a fitting display of

resources is made available as such events can be used to make complex statements regarding the maintenance of social status, hierarchy and mobility.

Until recently, little cash was needed to put on a major exorcism or healing ceremony. Performers were paid in kind and the bulk of the materials required for the actual performance could be gathered on a local basis, most being found in any Sinhalese house garden. One exorcist told of the days when he would make a diagnosis in the morning, tie a conditional thread and without leaving the household perform a ritual that very evening. Nowadays, once the conditional thread is tied it may be up to three months before there is enough cash accumulated to finance the event. It is not uncommon for the period agreed, on tying the thread, to expire without offerings having been made. In such cases a second thread may be tied, but this is considered most dangerous for patient and exorcist alike.

Cash expenditure on such events is great given the circumstances of the rural peasantry and urban poor with whom they are most popular. A major exorcism ceremony ranks amongst the most expensive of domestic rituals besides alms giving (dāne). Even the smallest rituals may cost up to 300 Rs. with more elaborate Suniyam and Bali Tovil costing between 3000 and 5000 Rs. The outlay for poorer rural families is often crippling and can rarely be achieved without the aid of loans and gifts from

kinsmen, and even in some cases loans from external agencies at exorbitant interest rates. In many families, the question of traditional healing methods becomes quite emotive when those who, for whatever reason, see the whole thing as mumbo-jumbo are coerced into contributing to an exorcism ceremony for an ailing sister or parent.

An Ādurā in his discussions with the patient's representatives will decide on the size and nature of the ritual to be performed. Invariably, he will work according to the magnitude of the disorder as well as the size of the patron's pocket, and usually end up advocating as large and elaborate a ritual as he thinks the patient can afford. All the rituals referred to in Section 2 of this Chapter can be augmented and diminished by either adding, elaborating and repeating sections or else excising and condensing others. For example, the diagnosis of a sorcery might result in the performance of a Suniyam ceremony by eight or more specialists and requiring 3-4 days to prepare and perform. It might include, offerings to many different demons, songs, poems, incantations, dramatic episodes, masking and comedy interludes. Alternatively, a koḍivina kāpīma may be performed in which an exorcist and his assistant give an offering to Suniyam Dēvatāva and intone mantra to cut the sorcery. Both rituals have the same effect, that is, they cut sorcery, but the former does it more totally and completely, covering dimensions which the simple cutting



of sorcery cannot possibly encompass. Efficacy and expenditure are directly linked. The greater the expenditure, the more likely is the effort and intention of the performers to achieve the desired results.

This relationship, however, is not only a clever ploy by performers to improve their incomes, for it also carries an important mythological sanction when it comes to the question of projecting the present into the mythical past and realising this past in ritual events in the present, such that the powers that worked then might similarly be made to work now. All the rituals of exorcism and healing performed by the Beravā are related to archetypal places and events. It is in part the aim of the ritual to re-create these places and events which often relate to the first manifestation of a particular sickness and how this was cured with the aid of the gods who first conceived of the curative rites now practised. In the poems and songs recited throughout the rituals, descriptions of the objects given by the gods to the sages (ṛṣi) are given: the golden rice pounders, the jewelled cockerels, and the drums sixteen miles long, etc. Needless to say rituals performed using the more earthly counterparts of these objects are not quite so efficacious as the incredible events upon which they were founded. As one informant put it: a car can run on kerosene, but it will not run very well! The important point is that the closer the ritual performance approximates to its

mythological archetype, the greater will be the cosmological projection and resulting efficacy. But as the performance becomes grander, so does the expenditure of the patron.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that performers earn substantially more for larger performances. The extent of expenditure upon ritual production is often the cause of comment for the performers involved, for whilst their contribution to the performance has a definite ceiling, the amount spent on incidental preparations is without apparent limit in some cases. In one instance, a Suniyam was held by a businessman (mudalāli) for his ailing wife. The ritual preparations included the hiring of a generator which powered flashing fairy lights which hung around the suniyam vīdiya. The whole event cost in the region of 6000 Rs. and attracted an audience which numbered in hundreds. The fees of the performers, however, were less than 50 Rs. except for the organiser who received 100 Rs. It is not so much that performers earn more for larger performances but rather, more of them get a chance to earn.

While expenditure of the type referred to above is far from the norm, it does expose the vital relationship between visible expenditure and social status. The whole event took on the character of a potlatch as food and refreshments were dissipated through the large crowd and

later in the ritual the mudalāli ostentatiously fluttered rupee after rupee upon the performers as they danced and sang their compliments to him. Even though performers do not necessarily get paid more for larger performances they still wholeheartedly acknowledge the relationship between ritual expenditure, social prestige and status. The larger the ritual the more personnel will be involved and the greater the kudos for the organiser in his own community. The assembly of a full troupe of dancers and drummers heightens considerably the sense of occasion for performers and patrons alike.

For each patron, the organisation of a large ritual also brings into play many other social and contextual relations. Once the decision to hold a ritual has been made there is a gradual spanning out through and consequent activation of kinship networks which may for the most part remain latent. The more grandiose the statement being made the greater the necessity of having the event witnessed by large numbers of kin and friends. Kinsmen are invited to assist in the preparations as reciprocities are fulfilled and new debts and obligations created. Kinswomen assist in the mammoth task of preparing food for guests and performers. At major ceremonies it is not unusual for audiences to swell to two or three hundred all of whom will expect some small token of hospitality from their hosts.

Food plays a critical role in such events as it is



normal to provide meals and refreshment for close kinsmen and important guests. A ritual may take between twelve and eighteen hours to complete during which time the hosts provide two or three main rice meals, to say nothing of the rounds of cakes and sweetmeats, tea and coffee, cigarettes and cheroots, and bidis and betel leaves which circulate throughout the night. With hospitality difficult to comprehend to a non-Sinhalese, the hosts must be seen to treat their guests properly; there must be no short-comings which may draw criticism or negative comment. Food and refreshment is distributed according to strict hierarchies, starting with the most important and the most senior, descending until resources fail. The importance of events of this type as expressions of collective sentiments of family and community is seen in the festive atmosphere which often prevails outside of the ritual arena. As one informant put it: 'people do not come for the hat baliya (ritual of the seven offerings), they come for bat helaya (the rice pot)', a neat spoonerism on the name of the ritual we were attending. Explicit reasons for attendance no doubt relate to a desire to see an afflicted friend or relative undergo a rapid recovery but the social undercurrents which the ritual sets in motion outside of the arena are a critical component in the overall efficacy of the ritual.

As stated above, the responsibility for the collection of materials required by performers, falls on the

patron(s). A list of the raw materials needed is given to the person holding the ritual once an agreement is made on the necessity of the ritual's performance (see Appendix II for an example of such a list). It is in the interests of the patron to ensure that all the items are available and in good condition. Should they fail to do this, the whole event could be jeopardised because the ritual cannot be performed properly. Furthermore, it is important that the performers are treated well, not only to ensure that they perform with good intentions but also to avoid the embarrassment of their criticism, which, in many cases would involve a low-caste person shaming a high-caste person. The materials collected may look bizarre to an outsider but they are in fact very ordinary and can be gathered locally or purchased in a local shop (kade). At one time the whole ritual context would have been easily assembled from available natural materials. Nowadays, however, many materials are becoming expensive as their availability decreases.[7]

Just as in the organisation of performance, it is not necessarily the performers who are the most expensive item, neither is it the materials they require. It is the incidental preparations which the patron takes upon himself which push up the cost considerably. As well as food and refreshment we can include the seating and shelter which may be borrowed or hired for the purposes of the ritual. Tarpaulins, corrugated iron sheets or cadjans

are used to shelter the dancing arena from the vagaries of tropical weather. Hurricane lamps are begged and borrowed from those around in order to light the arena throughout the night, at considerable cost in kerosene.

As far as the performers are concerned, all these factors are extraneous to the actions they will perform in the arena. Patrons often show reluctance to pay for the services they have received, yet, to the annoyance of the Beravā, they will spend inordinate amounts on the incidentals of ritual. However, looked at from the perspective of the patron it is the performers and their materials which are incidental to the success of a major ritual. A patron may safely assume that the Beravā will do their bit correctly and efficiently but what he cannot necessarily assume is the assembly of a large audience. A major ritual performance without a large audience is unthinkable and without doubt the sound of drums and shouts invariably attracts curious onlookers from far and wide but this is not necessarily the audience a patron desires to attract. It is essential that in a major performance the patient is located at the centre of a social network of kin and friends who by their presence and participation in the event express support and good will towards the afflicted party. Indeed, absence from such an event without good reason may arouse suspicion of sorcery or some other malign intent among the family putting on the ritual.



Audience composition then, is far from arbitrary but represents an activated community with the patient located literally at its centre. The ritual event which the Beravā perform provides the focus for the magical cure of an individual but disguises the real indexical aspects of the ritual (a disguise neatly exposed by the play on words on page 235). The patron pays to maximise ritual time by augmenting the scale and detail of the ritual, but he pays a great deal more in maximising the social time which necessarily accompanies this. The treatment of guests, in one form or another, accounts for the major part of the cost of putting on a ritual, and is critical in demonstrating the active relationships within a community. Indeed, as we have already seen, the implicit reason for attendance at such an event may be nothing more than the chance for a good feed at someone else's expense. Far more than this, however, the event provides the patron with the opportunity to assert and maintain, even elevate, his position in the community and to demonstrate social well-being as well as the physical and spiritual well-being which comes from any particular healing process. It could even be argued further that the greater the expenditure on a ritual event the better, in qualitative terms, will be its efficacy and outcome. A man who spends 4000 rs. on a Suniyam performance for himself, for example, is unlikely to allow the event to fail as he has staked a great deal on its successful

outcome. Psychologically and emotionally the ritual has begun to work even before he sets foot in the arena, rather in the same way that a person sitting in a Harley Street waiting room might begin to feel relief even before having their £500 consultation!

In their major rituals, the Beravā initiate a complex interplay between ritual and social domains. They embody and present their traditions in a social context activated by and for the patient. In a truly pragmatic sense they marry the content of their rituals indexically to their form. They provide a cure for an afflicted individual on an occasion when social space is maximally charged and made real, which is further the occasion when the cosmos is realised and made immanent for those assembled for the event.

#### 4.6 The Mangement of the performers

Having looked at some of the processes initiated for the patient and family once a decision to hold a ritual has been made, I turn now to the other side of the coin, that is, how the internal organisation of the Beravā works to provide the personnel to perform the rituals. As seen above, it is usually the Ādurā who, having made a diagnosis, enters into negotiations with the patient's representatives over the size and form of the ritual to be performed. In this role the Ādurā has the title of bāra mahattayā, 'the man who accepts [responsibility]'; he not only accepts responsibility for the safe return of the patient to health but also accepts responsibility for the organisation of any other personnel who may be required in the ritual. Not without reason the bāra mahattayā is also known by the name of the pala karana mahattayā, 'the man who spreads the word'. It is he who makes the diagnosis and secures work for other members of his community. To fulfil this role successfully the Ādurā must be in command of substantial kin networks from which he can draw co-operation and support as and when needed. A successful organiser can wield considerable power in his own community; he is the focus around which diverse knowledge and skills of different kinsmen are clustered.

Anyone in the community can be an organiser and many people at different times attempt to assert themselves by



organising their own rituals and events, only to come up against the harsh realities of deeply ingrained hierarchies and relationships of power. A successful organiser will draw on his own skills and knowledge but also enjoys ascribed status, to a certain extent, by virtue of family reputation and the identity of his teachers. The maintenance of position, however, is hard fought and competition between different organisers is often fierce as younger men try to establish their own networks and reputations. Performers frequently fall-out or become angry (tarahayi) with one another only to make-up at a later date, in some instances years after the incident. Like the 'Big-men' of Melanesian society, the organisers pay a high price for their power and evanescent prestige. Demands on their time and energy are considerable and the potential for attracting criticism is great.

In the sections which follow I illustrate how the organisation of personnel for ritual performance is carried out, using specific examples. The first example takes the form of the diary of an exorcist, M.A. Leeson (E11), for the month of August 1979. The diary, kept by Leeson himself, captures perfectly the incredible movement, day and night, which is the typical lot of the Adura. In the first seven days he performs at least sixty hours of actual ritual, to say nothing of the time spent in moving from case to case. In getting Leeson to

write a diary it was my aim to get information about the actual conditions of his patients and the method of remedying their ailments. What in fact Leeson chose to record as significant was the times and the places of the rituals, even to the extent, in the first entry, of saying which bus he caught and what time he caught it! He also gave the names of the rituals performed but not once included anything of their content. To get beyond the names of rituals and the names of certain ritual processes was often a great problem. Leeson, for example, could never see that there was anything to explain about the Mahā Sohōna Samayama, and as far as he was concerned, there wasn't! It was simply an assembly of skills and techniques for the particular purpose of dealing with Mahā Sohōna, which he had probably been in contact with from early childhood and over which he has practical mastery. Like any craftsman he has his tried and tested tools and techniques. What he does not necessarily have (and does not necessarily need unless confronted by an anthropologist) is the capacity to explicate and theorise about what is largely implicit and second-nature.

Leeson's diary provides us with a framework in which to set the second and third examples, which deal more with the organisation of larger performances. The diary illustrates the operation of an Adurā in his capacity as a solo practitioner but also includes occasions on which larger troupes were called for. The second example

illustrates the formation of what we can call a 'local' troupe, that is one brought together at relatively short notice and drawing on kinsmen mainly from a single village. The third example illustrates how personnel are organised for a 'major' performance, that is, one of substantial size in which more specialised performers are recruited from a wider geographical and kinship network.

#### 4.6.1 Diary of an exorcist (August 1979)

##### August 1st

Took the 8.00 a.m. Akuressa to Weligama bus from Imaduva and got down at Telijjavila, the journey finished at 10.30 a.m. at Walavvavatta. Having arrived there I respectfully took a cup of tea. In the house was a pregnant mother (gābīni matāva). The only protection that can be given to pregnant mothers from demons, spirits and the planets during pregnancy is the offering of the hand-held clay image (at-bali śāntiya). In order to do the śāntiya, tender coconut leaves (gok-kola), flowers and clay are needed. For the pregnant mother the dos which comes to pass (pāminennāvū dosa) from demons (yaksayangen) spirits (bhūtayangen) and the planets (grahayangen) will be expelled by the śāntiya. This was my main aim. I started at 2.30 p.m. and completed the whole in 6 hours at 8.30 p.m. and was able to return home the following day.



### August 2nd

A young man who lives near the Co-operative stores at Ganegoda was suffering from a stomach complaint (udarābada rōgayak). He was treated by several doctors but there was no recovery at all. The patient's parents asked me on July 27th to tie a conditional thread (āpa nūla - see above page 226 ) and thereafter the patient gained great relief (visāla suvayak). On August 3rd, Udēnis (E3), led by me (mulikāva mama) offered a pīdēniya according to the conditions promised when tying the āpa nūla, that is drumming for thirty Sinhalese hours (tis pāya) or twelve ordinary hours and gave offerings to the demons of the demon society (yakṣa samāgame yakunṭa pīdavili dīmen). Later we got the results (pratiphala) we had promised amidst great happiness we left the house to return home.

### August 4th

Went to a house near Beragoda at the request of the householder, where there was an old lady whose two hands were eaten by eczema (kusṭha rōga). An astrologer (daivajñayā) had advised her that it was necessary to perform a Graha Śāntiya and to tie a Navanātha Yantraya, (that is to perform an offering to the planets and have a particular yantraya constructed). And so on August 4th, I along with another went to the house. He intoned the yantraya 108 times (108 vara japā kirīma) and I, from the morning to the evening performed the Graha Śāntiya.

Later when the yantra was intoned we tied it to the patient and returned home the same day.

#### August 5th

A person of about 40 years of age living near Panugalgoda school at Dikkumbara has been seized by a severe attack of nausea (adika okkāraya) and a stomach pain (bade rujāvak). In accordance with the Āpa nūla tied earlier by Udēnis, seven of us went to the house to perform an Iramudun Samayama, a Mahāsohōna Baliya and a Mahāsohōna Samayama. The following morning the patient's deadly condition (asāḍya tatvaya) had largely gone away. We promised to give the patient a decoction (kasāyak) and on the August 6th we returned home.

#### August 6th

An astrologer having studied the horoscope of a boy of about 12 years living about 2 miles from Imaduva at the Vanavaha junction had told Udēnis the sort of things that had to be done. Udēnis accepted the task and I went as his follower (kṣṭavū giyā). On the evening watch (śṇḍā yāmayē) of August 6th until the following day we gave offering to demons of the Demon Society, then we came home.

#### August 7th

On the full-moon day (pura pasalosvaka) of Nikini (the lunar month of July-August), the first day of the lunar quarter (poda), before the rising of the moon,

from early morning until fifteen minutes past twelve I gave offerings on behalf of a man living near to Beragoda. An astrologer having looked at his horoscope had told me to make offerings to the demons. Afterwards returned home.

#### August 8th

An astrologer had ordered certain things to be carried out on behalf of a girl of 18 years suffering from eczema on both her legs below the knee. I accepted (bāra kala) responsibility. On August 8th I went there and stayed until the following morning (alu yāma) performing an Iramudum pīdēniya to the demon hoards along with other pīdēniya and cutting a sorcery (vina kṛpīma). I came home after sunrise at about 6.00 a.m.

#### August 9th

I was taken to a man who had been treated by doctors at three different places but had not found any relief at all. On August 9th I was led to the house, studied the patient and tied an ṛpa nūla with the intention of performing an Iramudum Samayama and a Mahāsohōna Samayama within seven days. After tying the thread I came home.

On the same day, in the evening, I tied another ṛpa nūla on an old lady living close by at Maramba kurumbera. An astrologer had told her to have an Iramudum Samayama and a Mahāsohōna Samayama performed. I put a seven day thread on the woman and returned home about seven at night.



August 11th

As a sequel to the ritual performed on August 3rd a ritual for the nine planets (Navagraha Śāntiya) was performed and a Nīlamandalaya yantraya was tied. On August 11th at sunrise, I, along with another as follower, went to his house. I performed the more important Graha Śāntiya and he intoned the yantraya. We returned home at six in the evening.

August 12th

Performed a ritual for a man over fifty years old living close to Beragoda. This was done after the disease was diagnosed by me.

August 15th

Not far from our house, at Uduvatta, lived the man on whom I had tied the conditional thread on August 9th. As he had received great relief after the tying of the thread we did an Iramudun Samayama, a Mahāsohōna Baliya and a Mahāsohōna Samayama and returned home on the 16th.

August 16th

About 2 miles from Imaduva at Kananke Rāja Mahā Vihāra I performed a Graha Śāntiya to the temple's High Priest, who is also the chief priest of the Southern Sri Lanka Sangha Judiciary. The priest was entering a bad planetary period (aphala kālaya). The Graha Śāntiya was started in the evening and finished the following morning. I returned home at about 8.00 a.m.

August 17th

An elderly woman living in Panugalgoda, near Dikkumbara, was subject to fits of unconsciousness from time to time. Her father came to find me in order that they might be released from this great difficulty. When the father came to find me I was not at home and another Adurā went off with him and tied an āpa nūla saying he would perform an Iramudun Samayama and a Mahāsohōna Samayama. On the 18th August I went there and performed an Iramudun Samayama only, and the patient completely recovered, leaving all very happy. I returned home in the evening.

#### August 18th

Also on this day I was invited to examine a young girl living near to the Rāja Mahā Vihāra at Kodagoda who was suffering from fever and headaches and despite treatment by several doctors had gained no relief. I was taken in the evening to examine the girl and I cut limes (dehi kṛpa) and tied a thread (nūla bhānda) and she later recovered.

#### August 19th

From 8.00 p.m. at night until 2.00 in the morning I performed a Graha Śāntiya to an elderly and sick woman living near to the school at Jamburegoda. An astrologer had looked at her horoscope and told her what to do to dispel the effects of a bad planetary period.

#### August 21st

In the evening I examined a sick young man living near

to Beragoda. I performed a small rite (Ḥdurukamak) and then came home.

August 22nd

Close to the house in which I performed the rite to the young man yesterday, I returned again today to do another diagnosis and small work (Ḥdurukamak) for a sick woman.

August 24th

I looked at the symptoms of the patient (rōga lakṣana parikṣā koṭa) a sick old lady living in a house near Imaduva town at Digoda, and afterwards performed an Iramudun Yāmaya. After this the patient recovered.

August 26th

Went to Hikkaduva to cut a sorcery and offer pīdēniya to the demon community on behalf of a young man who had been told by a soothsayer (pēn kiyannā) what ought to be done. With the assistance of others I went in the evening and returned home after sunrise the next day.

August 27th

Diagnosed a sick person living near Beragoda and in the evening performed a small rite (Ḥdurukamak) to her.

August 29th

About two miles from Imaduva town on the Makumbara road living at Mayakaduva was sick person who had been told by an astrologer that they should have a Graha Śāntiya performed and a Viṣṇu Mandalaya yantraya tied. At



the request of the household I went, with another as assistant, and did the Graha Śāntiya. He intoned the talisman and we returned the following day.

#### August 31st

Not far from Imaduva, about a mile along the Weligama road from Kananke, was a sick woman who had been told by an astrologer to have a baliya performed. The ritual was to consist of the floral offering with the 81 receptacles (asu-ek gāba mal baliya - see Appendix to Chapter 6) and two clay bali (māṭi bali dekak) making three bali in all. To do the ceremony Odiris had been appointed as organizer and I was among the five participants. We started in the evening and finished at 8.30 a.m., setting off for home at 9.30 a.m.

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The image of Leeson in his white national dress, pedalling gracefully off to 'work' on his black Raleigh bicycle, which had plastic flowers and images of the deities adorning the handle-bars and spirals of coloured tape around the frame, is one which will remain with me for a long time. In the area around Beragoda he is a well known figure in the local social landscape.

His work comes to him in the form of anxious relatives of some victim or other seeking him out in his home or through the communications which move with astonishing rapidity through the main street of the local town. Alternatively he receives 'referrals', diagnoses made by

other specialists ' such as astrologers and soothsayers, who, lacking the Adurā's executive powers, refer certain conditions to him.

As is clear from the diary, mobility is high and it is not surprising that one of the most important pieces of the Adurā's apparatus is his diary in which his programme of appointments are laid out weeks in advance. A wife or mother is also essential in this respect for it is she who often has the task of waking her sons or husband, and literally pointing them in the right direction.

Following in his grandfather's and father's footsteps, Leeson regularly performs Graha Śāntiya, small rituals in which invocations are made to the planets to avert misfortune. These rituals he is able to perform on his own and on occasion with an assistant. Rituals associated with the planets are considered to be Leeson's speciality and his solo performance of these rituals is something of a monopoly in the area.

In the other spheres, however, competition is more fierce. An interesting example of the way different performers frequently undercut each other is seen in the diary in the entry for 18th August. On this occasion a patient, seeking Leeson but unable to find him, had been seen by another adura. A diagnosis had been made and an agreement made that a Mahā Sohōna Samayama and an Iramudun Samayama be performed. Leeson, outraged at

having his business taken away, sought out the patient and after his own diagnosis performed an Iramudun Samayama only, thus dispensing with the major part of the originally prescribed ritual and cutting the cost to the patient considerably.

The diary provides us with a splendid illustration of how traditions, the subject of the previous chapter, are translated into concrete action in Leeson's day to day activities. The skills and techniques acquired from his family are used in the creation of social relationships with the wider society as he daily encounters people and their problems, accumulating a vast and intimate knowledge of the social environment in the area in which he operates. Social relationships within the caste are regularly forged and reasserted as kinsmen come together to apply their different knowledge and skills in corporate acts of ritual production. Leeson's success as an Adurā is crucial in this respect for he not only secures work for the rest of the community but also has the unenviable task of making decisions regarding which of his kinsmen he will work with when the need for larger ritual performances arises. Decisions of this nature are rarely arbitrary but as we shall see in the following section, follow more or less set patterns. Although, as the diary indicates, it is the smaller, individual healing rites which occupy the Adurā on a day to day basis, it is the larger ritual performances to which I would now like to



turn. These rituals bring prestige to the organiser and consolidate his power in the community and create a powerful sense of community co-operation and expression vis a vis the wider society.

#### 4.7 The structure of troupes

The formation of troupes (kandāyama or iyella) almost always follows particular kinship patterns.[8] Only very rarely would a man perform with a completely unknown troupe. For a troupe to operate effectively in performance there must be co-operation and familiarity and this is often built up over many years of performing with teachers who are also kinsmen, and in turn becoming teachers to pupils who are likewise co-performers and kinsmen.

The process of ascent and displacement, which takes place over the many years in which a man will perform with various members of his village and wider kin group, makes the performance of ritual a living milieu for the transmission of knowledge and skills. Internally, traditions spiral down through kin and community, externally Tradition manifests itself to the wider society in the form of such collective ritual performances. These are the points at which Tradition is actively expressed.

Troupes are formed in response to the need for some ritual or other and may result in the activation of various networks of kin. An organiser will know the

kinsmen upon whom he can legitimately make demands, who is likely to be available, who is reliable, who can perform which episodes the best, and how to square up these variables with particular ritual requirements. To ensure anything like a continual supply of work, those who are not organisers must necessarily exploit whatever work possibilities they can, which often involves spreading the net over a range of kinsmen. The groups thus formed tend to be semi-durable and, as well as kinsmen who perform together on a more regular basis, also include men from other communities.

In all troupes the key relationship which binds performers together is that between brothers-in-law (massina-massina), that is, men standing in an egalitarian, 'joking' relationship. Frequently, the relationship is between an actual wife's brother and sister's husband as Figure 13 shows. Certain combinations regularly work together and in the two examples which follow illustrations are given of how these relationships operate in the formation of troupes.

The first example shows the formation of a troupe which regularly operates from Beragoda. Four of the five main performers live close by one another in the village and regularly come together at relatively short notice for performances in the vicinity of Beragoda. Figure 13 shows the performers who came together for the performance of a Sanni Yakkuma about a mile from Beragoda. A local troupe

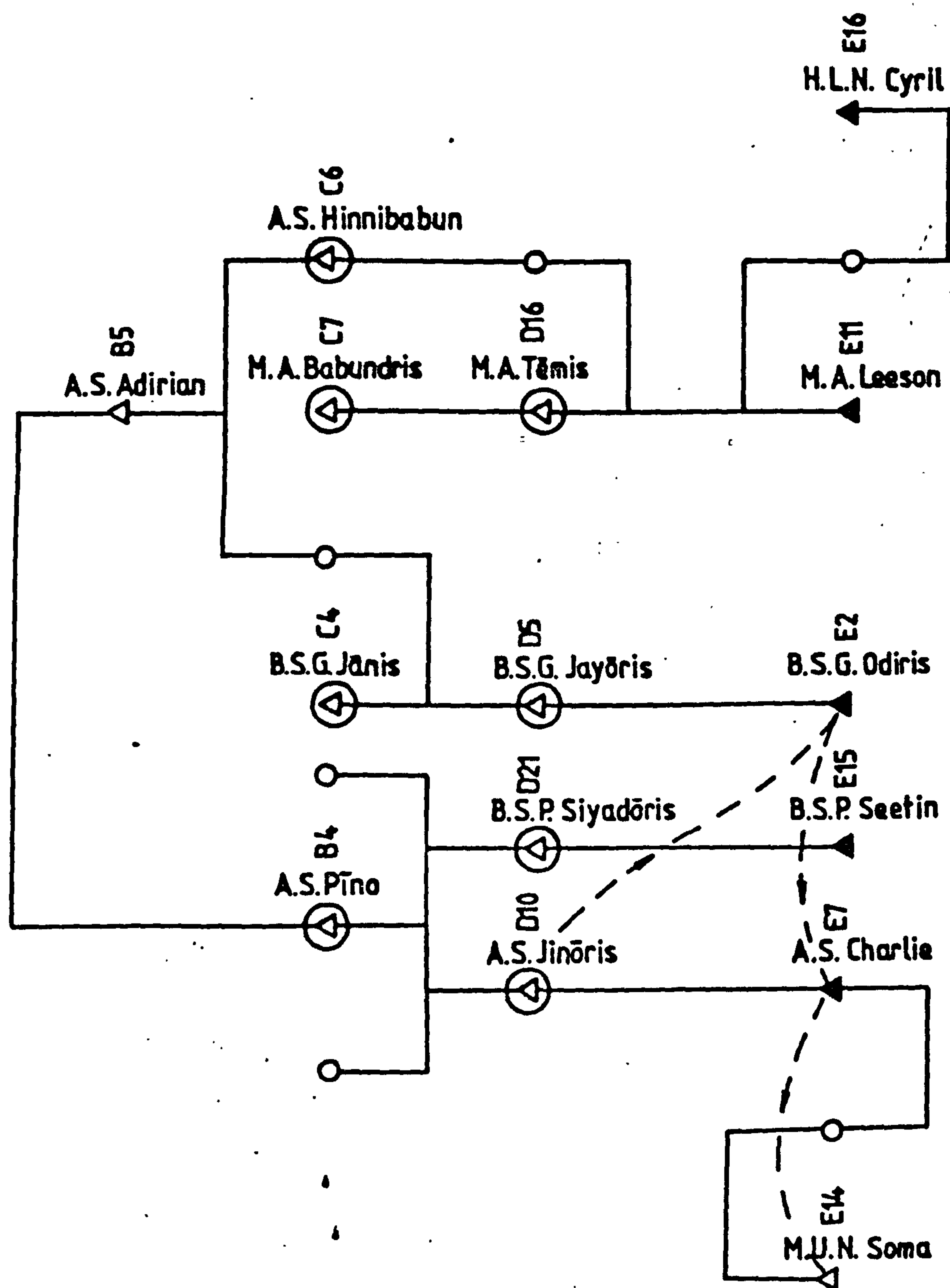


Figure 13. The formation of a 'local troupe'.



such as this would perform the ordinary tovil ceremonies which comprise much of the day to day work of the exorcist. In Beragoda, word concerning such work is passed quickly as men hang around one another's houses and keep well-informed of one another's business. The men circled in the first and second ascending generation also regularly performed together from the village, giving certain relationships in the present a sense of historical inevitability.

The organiser of the ritual was B.S.G. Odiris (E2) who co-ordinated the performance as well as danced and made some of the more important offerings to the Sanni Yakka. Leeson (E11) a massina of Odiris took the role of mantrakārayā performing all the magical formulae used in the ritual and carrying out the dangerous avamangale episode (see Appendix 1.). He also assisted in the dancing in the mahā samayama. Cyril (E16), a massina to both Odiris and Leeson, provided the drumming. Charlie (E7) a massina to all performers except Seetin (E15), his half-brother, provided the principal dancing and particularly the Dahā Aṭa Pāliya for which he and Cyril are widely renowned. Soma (E14), the fifteen year old brother of Charlie's wife, was at that time undergoing an apprenticeship with Charlie and was allowed to perform various small items in the ritual. Seetin (E15) provided back-up drumming to Cyril's lead.

In addition to the close kinship relationships which

bind such a group together, they also share a common heritage by virtue of the teaching relationships carried on within the group. For example, Odiris as a boy studied under Jinōris (D10). Later in life Odiris went on to teach Charlie, the son of Jinōris with whom he now works (cf. Figure 6, page 164). Similarly, Soma was studying from Charlie, accompanying him to places of work and receiving instruction in the course of the performances. He was also resident with his gurunnānse in Beragoda.

The second example involves the recruitment of performers from a wider geographical area. The troupe represented in Figure 14 were brought together for the performance of a Bali Tovil (described in Chapters 6 and 7). The tovil was a major event and drew together seven performers of considerable skill and reputation. The performers were drawn from six different villages but were still all closely related with the exception of Waḍu Mutta (D23), literally 'Woodworking Grandfather' who never occurred in any of the genealogies drawn up although a massina to Alson (E1) and Babōris (D22).

The ritual was organised by N.P. Babōris (D22) a renowned balikārayā from the Ahangama area. He had been commissioned to perform a Bali Tovil in which seven images were to be constructed and dedicated. As the organiser, Babōris took charge of the opening recitations which are often the most difficult as they are lengthy and include many Sanskrit couplets (ślōka). Odiris, Waḍu

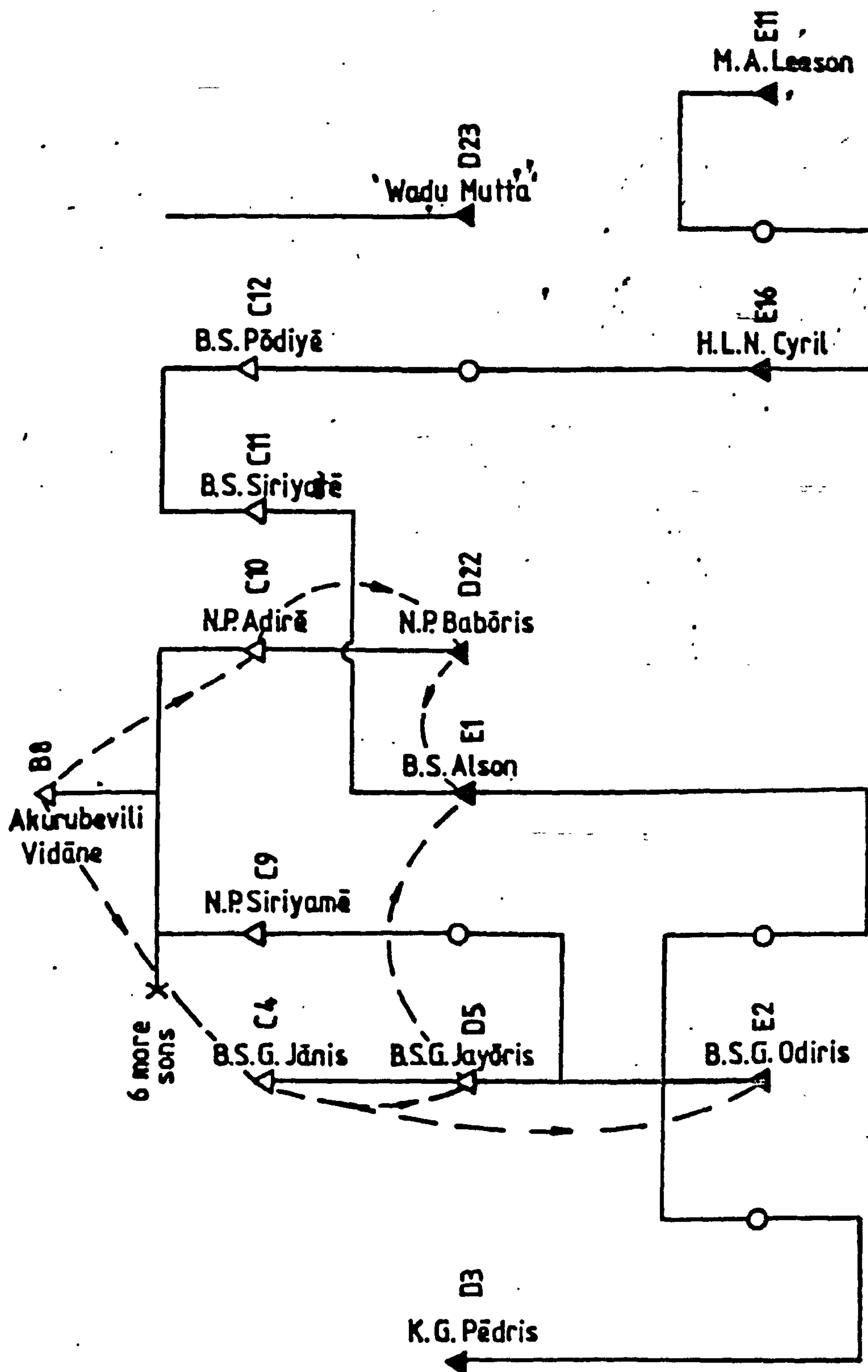


Figure 14. The formation of a troupe for a major performance.



Mutta, Leeson, Alson and Babōris performed the singing and dancing, working together in combinations of two's and three's to the accompaniment of Cyril and Pēdris on the drums. Odiris was given special responsibility for the construction of the Viskam Baliya, the main deity to which the offerings were to be made, and, along with Alson his massina conducted the dedication of the image in the course of the ritual. Odiris' appropriateness for this task arose from the fact that Jānis (C4), Odiris' grandfather had been the most renowned sculptor of images of Viskam Deviyō in the Southern Province; this skill had been passed on to Odiris.

The bulk of the recitations were carried <sup>on</sup> by combinations of performers in which Odiris, Alson and Babōris figured predominantly. Not only do these three have close kinship ties but can all trace their knowledge and skills in Bali Tovil performance back to a single individual, the grandfather of Babōris, Akurubevili Vidāne. He taught his own sons as well as B.S.G. Jānis (C4), both these men passed on their skills to their own sons, and grandson in Jānis's case. Alson, who married the daughter of Jayōris (D5), acquired knowledge and skill from both Jayōris and Babōris.

#### Notes to Chapter 4

[1] General introductions to the nature of Sinhalese demonology can be found in a rich literature spanning over a century. The most important contributions to this literature are Callaway (1829), Dandris Da Silva

(1865-66), Barnett, (1917) who provides an invaluable index to the poems collected by Hugh Nevill (1956), Pertold (1930) and Wirz (1954). More recent accounts of the overall belief system and particularly the place of exorcism and healing within it can be found in Ames (1962) and Yalman (1964).

[2] A more complete description of the demon Mahā Sohōn and his origin can be found in Wirz (1954:28-30). Accounts of the actual performance of the ritual can be found in Egan (1969) and Kapferer (1975:16-63) and in a forthcoming publication.

[3] For myths of origin of the Rata Yakkuma ceremony see Wirz (1954:35-36) and Raghavan (1967:262-263). For account of actual performances see Wirz (op cit: 64-69) and Saraccandra (1966:38-42 and 145-152).

[4] See Wirz (op cit:42-47) and Obeyesekere (1969:181-197) for myths of origin of the Sanni Yakka, and Wirz (47-64) and Saraccandra (op cit: 33-38) for accounts of the ritual's performance. Obeyesekere (op cit:189) gives a list of the eighteen Sanni demons and goes on to discuss the etymology and significance of their titles.

[5] Myths of origin and accounts of the performance of Suniyam are provided by Wirz (op cit: 30-34 and 69-83).

[6] Callaway's translation of the poem 'On the Practices of a Kapua' (1829), although over 150 years old still captures some of the underlying ambivalence in the exchanges between an Adurā and his clients.

[7] For example, the ubiquitous young coconut leaf decorations (gok-kola) are made from unfurled coconut leaves, the collection of which can seriously damage healthy trees. The extent to which gok-kola is used, particularly at major festivals as a street decoration, has prompted the government to consider introducing restrictions, such is its effect on coconut production.

[8] Once again I must emphasise that there were occasional exceptions to this such as a Goyigama Adurā, taught by a man from Beragoda. This man would, on certain occasions, work with troupes operating from the village.



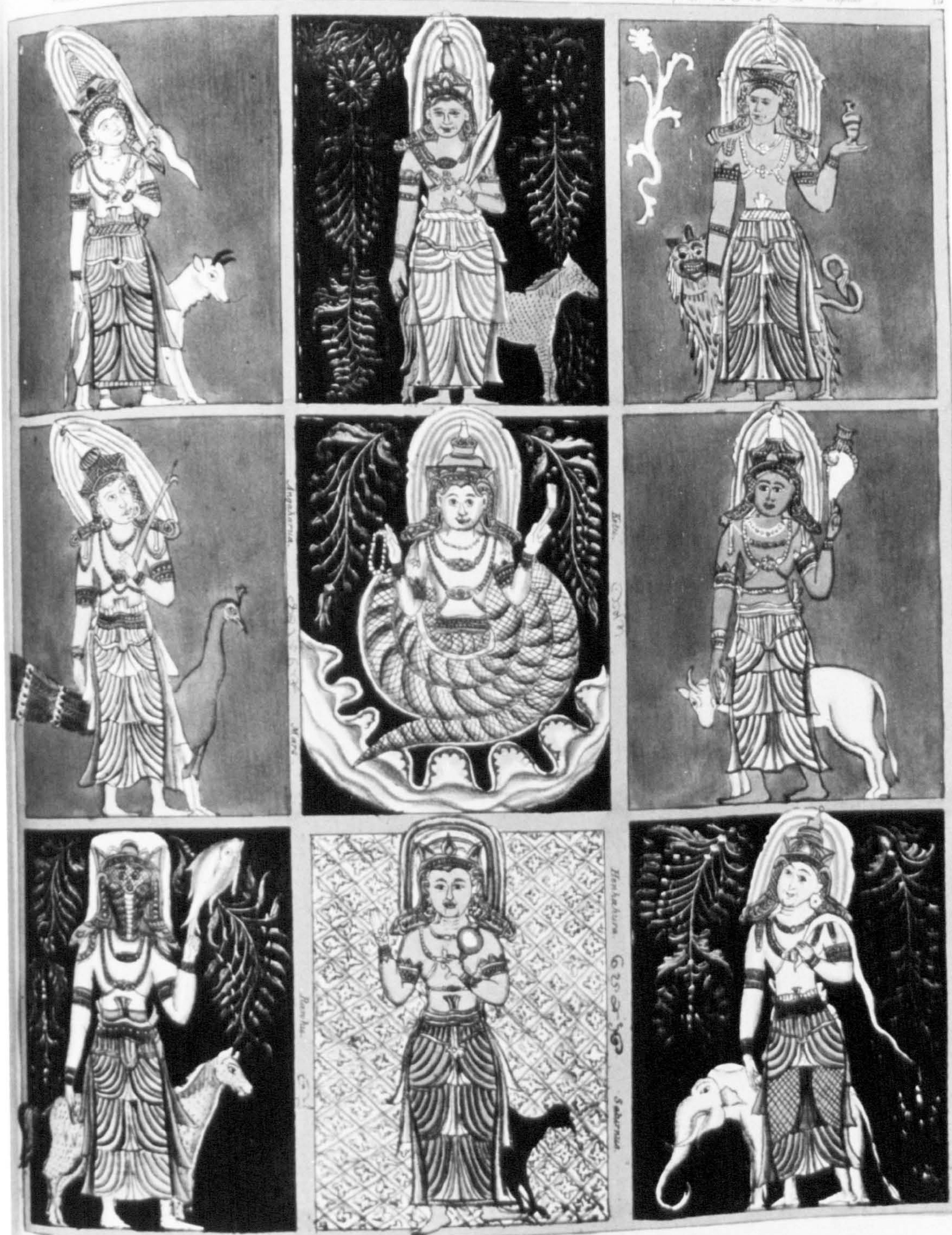


Plate V. Drawings of the nine planets (reproduced from Upham 1829).



## CHAPTER 5

## THE BALI TOVIL: A RITUAL DEFENCE AGAINST MALEVOLENCE

'Their whole life, thinking and striving is.... always taken up by constant precautions, defences, and compensations, by a constant fight against invisible forces and foes of all kinds...'

(Wirz 1954:1)

5.1 Introduction

In the previous four chapters we have examined the social context in which ritual production among the Beravā takes place. Attention was drawn to the inter-relationships between caste, community, tradition and ritual knowledge. In the following three chapters I turn to a detailed examination of a single ritual complex, namely that of the Bali Tovil (tovilaya sing.). These are healing rituals in the broadest sense, performed to alleviate personal misfortune and affliction. They are generally described in the literature[1] as rituals in which the malevolent influences of the planets are exorcised through the making of offerings. Closer investigation, however, reveals a complex amalgam of

beliefs, ideas and practices which provide a graphic and immediate means of tackling personal misfortune.

The choice of this particular ritual complex, rather than one of the other four rituals practised by the Berava, was made for a number of important reasons.

In the first place, it is hoped that the data presented in Chapters 6 and 7 will provide a contribution to the ethnography on, and our understanding of, Sinhalese healing rituals in general. Although mentioned in passing by many ethnographers, Baliya and other related rituals have received scant attention.[2] Similarly, astrology despite its importance in Sinhalese society generally, is often mentioned but little understood, either from the perspective of its practical application or its social consequences.[3] Examination of the Bali Tovil enables us to locate astrology and the question of personal misfortune within the wider framework of Theravada Buddhist cosmology in Sinhalese society.

Secondly, the Baliya provides a useful means to illustrate the various traditions which must be brought together to achieve a coherent and effective performance. It is in such a performance that the knowledge and skill discussed in Chapter 3, are brought together and made manifest. Dance, music, costume and the subtle inter-play of artistic forms all contribute to the elaboration of a powerfully persuasive ritual context, a time and place outside of ordinary time and space capable of transforming

sickness into health. It is in such events that Beravā traditions are kept alive by their continual regeneration in performance.

A final, and not least important, reason for studying the Baliya in detail is that it provides the opportunity to document a most beautiful and complex ritual form which appears to be becoming increasingly rare, as those who are versed in the intricacies of its performance become fewer. It is undoubtedly the most difficult ritual to perform in the Beravā repertoire on account of the extensive recitations it contains. Fewer and fewer young people from the caste see the point in embarking upon the long and difficult path to become an accomplished balikārayā. Ten or twenty years is too long to wait for gratification for a young man in a rapidly developing third world country.

In the course of this chapter a brief account of the mythical genesis of the Bali Tovil is provided before going on to examine just what constitutes the category 'Bali Tovil' in terms of its underlying beliefs, the diagnosis which precedes a performance, and the actions intended to relieve the condition. It is also necessary to examine the role which Bali Tovil play in the overall division of ritual labour in Sinhalese society and the ways in which this category is articulated within the wider cosmic order. This will entail an examination of



the role of astrology and astrologers in Sinhalese society.

## 5.2 Mythical origins and legends of the Bali Tovil

An important theme to have emerged from Chapters 3 and 4 has been the use of the past or 'pastness' as a means to assert the legitimacy of ritual acts in the present. In Chapter 3 this took the form of an investigation of the nature of traditions (paramparāva) and how they are handed down from powerful and illustrious ancestors and manipulated for practical purposes in the present. In Chapter 4 (cf. Section 5) an attempt was made to relate these issues to the performance of ritual in the present and in particular the way in which ritual performance can be made to serve the status interests of patrons in the present. The Beravā, through their Tradition, provide a means of mediation between the present and archetypal events located in a mythical past.

In this section I would like to develop the analysis further by looking at the myths and tales which are believed to provide the genesis of the Bali Tovil. In this respect two sets of myths, related by informants in connection with the Bali Tovil, will be examined. The first concerns the cure of sickness which took place in India at the time of the Buddha and the second relates to the coming to Sri Lanka of the means to achieve this cure. Both sets of stories provide more established frameworks

upon which actions and ideas in the present can be hung and from which they can derive a certain air of legitimacy.

This section is not intended to be an exercise in historiography even though there are points at which there appear to be tantalising overlaps between 'historical facts' and some of the mythical projections made onto the past by ritual exponents in the present. For example, many of the planetary symbols and motifs do go back to Vedic times[4], and the ritual undoubtedly has its own specific history and development. To attempt to reconstruct such a history would be an awesome task and well beyond the scope of this thesis. What we can attempt, however, is an explication of certain myths and tales related to the Bali Tovil and their role in maintaining the ideology of the ritual in the present day.

In the first instance, Bali Tovil, or rather the particular style of offering which now characterises the Bali Tovil, is believed to have originated in North India at the time of the Buddha. The setting for the events which gave the ritual its genesis, as revealed by informants both in conversation and in the poems sung throughout the ritual, is the mythical city of Visāla Mahā Nuvara, the capital city of the Liccavi kings.[5]

Whatever the actual historical connections (if any) between the Bali and this particular place and time, the Bali is given a certain legitimacy by the very fact of its

location in an ancient and more established Buddhist mythological tradition.

The particular events which led to the creation of Bali offerings are to be found in a well known story which tells how the Buddha was able to subjugate demons who were destroying the Liccavi kingdom. The city of Visāla had fallen prey to demons and was smitten by drought, famine and pestilence, collectively referred to as the janapata rōga. Chaos prevailed and thousands died. The Liccavi princes called upon the Buddha to help them in their plight and along with 500 of his followers (arahant) he made a journey to the stricken city. In the city he sprinkled holy water (pirit pāṇ) and chanted holy verses (pirit), notably the 'Jewelled Discourse' (Ratana Sutta). The evil spirits fled in the face of the Buddha's supreme benevolence and order and prosperity were restored to the kingdom.

In popular versions related in connection with the Bali Tovil the story now continues to include an arrangement made between the Buddha and the demons such that the demons may continue to cause their afflictions upon people but, upon receipt of appropriate offerings, they will desist from causing suffering. The responsibility for creating the appropriate offerings fell to the sages (ṛṣi or pōranādurā) who, with the inspiration of the gods, set about making the ritual offering which was to become the Bali Tovil.



The first part of the story, that is up to Buddha vanquishing the demons, is a well known story; it is found in the Pali commentaries and is amply documented elsewhere (eg. Malalasekera 1960, vol.II:709-710 and Reynolds 1970:117-130). The story belongs to a 'higher', more orthodox tradition in which no mention is made of offerings, planets or astrology. It is in the second part of the story that these elements are introduced. They enter the story under the auspices of the Buddha's 'arrangement' with the demons. He shows compassion for them and allows them to have a limited amount of contact with the world of men in order that they might have some possibility of rising from their despicable condition. From that time on, whenever the demons wreak their disruptive effects upon people, the making of offerings in the way created by the rsis at that time, will bring relief. In the context of Bali Tovil the demons are identified as the planets and associated phenomena; it is to them that the offerings are primarily directed.

The juxtaposition of these two mythical elements, the triumph of the Buddha at Visāla, taken from the orthodox tradition, and the contract between the Buddha and the demons such that they may receive offerings, the product of popular tradition, is an important device whereby the latter, by association with the former, is authenticated and legitimated within a wider Buddhist tradition.

This final point echoes Obeyesekere's observations

concerning the origin of the Kōla Sanniya, his eighteen demon followers (Sanni Yakka) and the ritual in which their effects are exorcised (Sanni Yakkuma) (Obeyesekere 1969). As with the Bali Tovil, the Visāla story serves to locate events within a more established tradition. The demons causing affliction in Visāla are the Kōla Sanniya and his associates. They are subjugated by the Buddha and once again an agreement is made whereby, in return for offerings thereafter, the Kōla Sanniya will desist from causing his afflictions. The subjugation of the Kōla Sanniya and his acceptance of offerings is celebrated in the Sanni Yakkuma in a dramatic episode during the Dahā-aṭṭa Pāliya. During this episode the Kōla Sanniya (a masked dancer) tries to gain access to the patient but is eventually forced to acknowledge publicly the authority of the Buddha (ibid:190-197).

In his article Obeyesekere concludes on an 'historical note' in which he traces some of the divergences and convergences between the myths of Kōla Sanniya and Buddhist doctrinal texts. As with the Bali Tovil, the Kōla Sanniya myths and the rituals in which they are recalled and enacted are composed of elements from diverse traditions: the popular and the doctrinal. Obeyesekere (ibid:215) sees the significance of this convergence of Traditions in "an attempt to incorporate a 'folk cult' into the dominant Buddhist religion through its mythological system". The Kōla Sanniya myths he

suggests are a much later diffusion from South India, incorporated into the Theravāda tradition by processes of the kind referred to above.

The interesting point to arise from this brief comparison is that similar processes of integration between levels within the broader Buddhist mythological tradition are taking place. Irrespective of actual historical developments, both the Bali and Sanni Yakkuma, as they are understood and performed in the present day, both draw upon the same Buddhist myth to validate beliefs and actions which undoubtedly came much later. In the case of the Bali these ideas relate to misfortune arising from bad planetary influences, whereas in the Sanni Yakkuma they relate to ideas about disease and its supernatural origination. Both sets of ideas are firmly rooted in popular notions about disease and misfortune, and the means to combat them magically

But what of the ritual context which was created by the ṛgīs in the wake of the archetypal encounter between the Buddha and the demons? In statements given by informants and in the poems they relate in the course of Bali rituals the emphasis is not on the Visāla story, which is related briefly, or even simply referred to from time to time, but on the extensive details concerning preparations, construction of offerings trays and the manner of performance of the ritual. Crucial in this respect is the centre-piece of Bali rituals, a floral



altar (mal baliya) containing nine, twenty-five or eighty-one squares, into which offerings are placed for the planets and various other deities and demons. Nevill (1955 vol.3: 293), using a translation of a poem which he claims to be in excess of 200 years old, provides us with the following description:

'The altar was made of plantain stems, a cubit and four finger widths square, and a square enclosure made around it. Nine kinds of leaves, rice of nine colours, nine kinds of flowers, betel, nine offerings were taken for the offering. The nine coloured rice is for the twelve rāsi or zodiacal signs, and the colours are red, white, yellow, smoke or grey, black, another red, blue, golden and blue-black. The offerings for the planets are to be placed in their special directions etc. etc.'

It is careful and detailed prescriptions such as these that are believed to have been formulated by the sages in ancient India. With divine inspiration the ṛṣis, also referred to as Brahmins (bamunō) and 'the ancient teachers' (pōranādurā), first made these offerings and passed the instructions on to their descendants as a means of combatting affliction:

'sirisanda satara nāna  
ugat bamunō pera dina  
isi basa lesa porana  
yaga upatak sādī melesina'

'From four wisdoms which are like the beautiful moon,  
the learned brahmins of earlier days  
with the ancient ṛṣis words of old  
prepared an offering in this way.'

('four wisdoms' possibly refers to the four Vedas (catur veda).[6])

However recently the present form of the ritual may have in fact been devised, the belief that there is a fundamental connection between events which took place in ancient India at the time of the Buddha and ritual action in the present is a crucial element in the ideology of the ritual. By following the instructions of the sages as they are believed to have come down in poems and stories transmitted primarily in an oral mode, it is believed that victims in the present can be cured. Each performance seeks to re-enact the conditions and the setting of the archetypal cure working according to the 'because then... therefore now' proposition. The rituals are in part taken up with their own exposition and explication, how things are to be done correctly, how things are to be made and what the correct sequences are. Like Lewis (1980:19) in his discussions with informants about rituals in New Guinea, I also found people unable or reluctant to talk about meaning or exegesis whereas discussion of the correct way to do things was invariably lengthy and detailed. Each ritual performance, if it is to be efficacious, should be an accurate reduplication of the original. It is at this point that the question of ritual efficacy and the manner in which tradition is transmitted within the Beravā caste overlap: teachers and their reputation stand between the source and its manifestation as ritual performance in the present. Just how the source is connected to the present in ritual performance itself

will be the subject of Chapter 7, but it is sufficient to say at this point that contemporary performers orient themselves to the past, to the source, by means of their pedigrees of learning (paramparāva). The idea of an unbroken chain of transmission extending back into a hazy blur of myth and history, and ultimately to the source, is central to the notion of accurate reproduction in the present, of actions and events located in *illo tempore*. Before going on to examine this important idea in greater detail, brief mention must be made of one other set of stories which are recounted in connection with the origin of Bali.

The stories related above refer to the origin of the floral altar (mal baliya). However, there is another set of stories which tell of the origin of the clay images which are constructed in many of the larger Bali ceremonies. These stories tell how a Liccavi prince was the victim of a sorcery cast by the demon king, Vesamuni Rāja.[7] Other versions state that it was the Buddha's perpetual adversary, Vasavāti Mārāya, who was responsible for afflicting the child. As a result of the sorcery the child fell into a coma and the king sought frantically for a cure to his son's condition.

As with the stories recounted above it is the sages or ṛṣi who come to the king's aid. Together they devise a ritual in which an image of the king's son is constructed in sand (vāli bali) and offered to the demons in his



stead. From this original event subsequent afflictions are cured by the offering of images in a variety of substances such as sand, clay, rice, etc. on behalf of the patient to the demons. As with the development of the mal baliya the variety of imagery arising out of the archetypal context is now vast and without doubt the product of centuries of syncretism and creative input by past transmitters of the tradition.

However, in their discussions of the origins of the ritual, a connection is asserted between themselves and their present activities, and those of the sages of ancient India who lived over 2000 years ago. As might be expected the connection over such a lengthy period is inevitably vague and fraught with inconsistencies.

As stated above, some objective historical reconstruction of times, places and events might be possible but this lies beyond the scope of the thesis. What we can do is to remain with a 'presentist' line of argument, that is, while acknowledging the existence of history and actual events, look primarily at how this history is viewed and presented in the present, rather in Malinowski's sense of a 'social charter'.

Crucial in this respect are a number of stories which are related by informants concerning the arrival of various ritual forms, including the Bali Tovil, in Sri Lanka. These stories, and incidentally the use made of them by various commentators, shed interesting light on

the question of the connections between present day performers and their reputed predecessors.

The stories concern a time when the knowledge to perform ceremonies for the bestowal of blessings by the making of offerings did not exist on the island. At that time large numbers of Brahmins (bamunō) came across from India, reputedly from the Soli Rata, to perform these rites for the aristocracy of the time. The Brahmins were very erudite and had extensive knowledge of healing rites involving the stars and planets. Their rituals were very popular in the courts and they were able to carry off great wealth in return for their services.

It was against this backdrop that my informants would relate an anecdote concerning an encounter between a Brahmin and a Buddhist priest. My informants identified the priest as Srī Rāhula of Toṭagamuva, a well known fifteenth century scholar priest renowned for his poetic and literary work and known to have taken an interest in Mahayana Buddhism and popular Tantrism (Godakumbura 1955:193 and 197). In the South of the island the exploits of Rāhula are greatly elaborated and have become lodged in popular mythology. This is the case with the story in question in which Rāhula invites a Brahmin priest back to his temple after the latter has performed a blessing ceremony (śāntiyak) for a Sinhalese king. Under the pretext of discussing the ritual, the Brahmin is coaxed into giving a lengthy discourse expounding verses,

magical formulae and instructions relating to rituals performed to the planets. Unknown to the Brahmin, Rāhula has hidden in his wardrobe one of his acolytes who is skilled in dictation. Such is his skill that he is able to take down everything that the Brahmin says using a stylus and ola leaf book (puskola pota). When the Brahmin has completed his discourse Rahula remains unimpressed, announcing that he already has such a book in the temple. The Brahmin, in disbelief, demands to see it and the acolyte is duly summoned. Upon presenting the book he apologises that he has not had time to blacken the letters (tava kālu mādalat nā), an indication that the book has only just been written. Realising that he has been tricked, the Brahmin storms away in a fury. Thus it is believed the knowledge to perform rituals to the planets came to Sri Lanka.

Although other versions record the same events they often contain different dramatis personae. For example, the versions collected by Wirz around Galle in the 1940's identify the central monk figure as Vidāgama., another powerful literary monk who was also adviser to Bhuvaneka Bāhu V (1360-1390). Sederaman (1964:1-2) goes one step further in his version in stating that it was after a sāntiya performed to this particular king that the Brahmin was duped into passing on his knowledge.

The image of scholarly and venerable priests hiding people in medieval wardrobes in order to trick pompous



Brahmins is a highly unlikely one and smacks of popular folk tradition. However, in the light of our investigations concerning the present day exponents of the Bali rituals these tales take on another significance. I would suggest that they attempt to provide some solution to the question of how Hindu rituals performed by Brahmins in North India end up being performed by low-caste Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

Just as the myth recounted above concerning the triumph of the Buddha at Viśāla was seen to authenticate popular traditions of various origins, so I would assert that here a similar process is taking place. The identification of the coming of ritual knowledge from India with two actual figures from Buddhist history serves to authenticate traditions which have probably swept across from India at various points in history and locates them in a wider Buddhist tradition.

This assertion is given further credibility from literary sources of the time. As stated above both Rāhula and Vidāgama were renowned for their literature and poetry including compositions such as the Cintāmāni Śāntiya, Ratnālankāra and Budugunālankāra. These fifteenth century compositions were often cited by informants as providing the model recitations upon which Bali Tovil, as they are performed today, are based. For example, Budugunālankāra, 'The Beauteous Virtues of the Buddha', composed by Vidāgama in 1470, tells of the plague

at Visāla and the various courses of action pursued by the king to relieve his country's plight. Various suggestions are made, including offering food to the planetary deities, but ultimately the author remains cynical of the more Hindu solutions and suggests appeal to the Buddha as the only real solution. Reynolds (1970:269) identifies the anti-brahmanical, even satirical, theme in Vidāgama's poem and also comments on its less ornate, popular style. Are we to assume that Vidāgama's anti-brahmanical stance in his poetry has somehow percolated down through history to find popular expression in tales in which he tricks Brahmins?

Any answer to this question must ultimately remain speculative as evidence is slim. However, by way of conclusion to the episode with the Brahmin, I would like to mention two points which arise in the versions of the story given by Wirz (1954:121). In the first place Vidāgama only succeeds in getting half of the ola leaf book from the Brahmin who, in his rage, snatches the book and storms away. Using the partial text stolen from the Brahmin and, making up the remainder using Buddhist sources, the monks are able to reconstruct the rituals previously known only to the Brahmins. This mixing of traditions is put forward as the source of a distinction between the Bali Tovil and the Śāntiya ceremonies, the former being the creation of the monks and the latter being the original knowledge elicited from the Brahmin.

The second point worthy of note in Wirz's version (op cit:122) is that the hybrid rituals created by the monks found no adherents to the new ritual teachings amongst the literati and aristocracy of the time but found a ready audience amongst the lower classes where the rituals had an immediate appeal. He cites the Oli or Potter caste as an example, suggesting their vocation as potters facilitated the offering of images in clay.

Wirz collected his data in the Galle area in the 1940's and undoubtedly used low caste ritual officiants as the source for his rich data. I would suggest that, far from being a rational reconstruction of events that actually took place, the embellishments he provides on the original tale represent a Beravā, or Oli, perspective on their own traditions. They are an attempt to provide justification and legitimation for rituals which might not be altogether approved of in more orthodox realms of Buddhist belief.

In expounding on their own relationship as Beravā with the ritual and its origins, present day performers, paradoxically, identify with both the Buddhist and Hindu aspects of the myth.

Firstly, my informants would relate the story of the Brahmin and the priest with a certain relish; for after all, the success of the priest represents a victory for Buddhism over the ever present threat of cultural deluge from Hinduism. Furthermore, the deception



perpetrated by the priest is suggestive of the 'trickster' image which the Beravā hold so dearly. Trickery and deception lie at the very heart of the process of exorcism and many stories are told within the community which extol the exploits of famous 'tricksters'. [8] As Buddhists the identification is clearly with the monks.

However, on the other hand, it was not uncommon for many Beravā men, and particularly ritual performers, to give their caste as the Bamunu Kūliya, the Brahmin caste. This title was supported by many vaguely formulated claims that the Beravā were a high status Brahmin caste who somehow fell from grace, a belief not uncommon among low castes throughout South Asia. This belief was used by informants to explain why it was that the Beravā carried such rich and important traditions within the society but yet, at the same time, were treated so badly. One man even produced a poem of dubious antiquity, written on ola leaf, which he offered as validation of such a claim. He carefully pointed out, for example, that restrictions on commensality and interaction were not to stop them contaminating others, but in keeping with their Brahmanic origin, were to stop others defiling their purity. In this light it is clear that the identification is with the disaffected Brahmins.

The paradox is one between notions of transformation and continuity. Transformation in the sense that ritual traditions which exist in the present are believed to have

come from ancient India but have been mediated by Buddhist priests, thus keeping cultural innovation within the parameters of Buddhism. On the other hand the idea of continuity is crucial in that some notion of descent from Brahmins be maintained, conceptually at least, in order that the link with the formulators of the ritual, and hence the power and authority whereby they achieved the effects that they did, be kept alive.

The paradox must necessarily be maintained as long as the Beravā perform their rituals in the way that they do.[9] As will be seen in Chapter 7, the efficacy and persuasive power of present day performance rests in large part on the identity of the performers and their orientation to the past, be it mythical or historical.

### 5.3 Planetary rituals

Rituals dealing with the planets are to be found in various forms and, like other rituals performed by the Beravā, they can be organised and performed with varying degrees of size and complexity. Some commentators have used the hybrid term 'grahaism' (graha = planets) to characterise this area of ritual activity (the first was probably De Silva 1865-66:4) but the theme which I would like to focus on is the nature of the offerings given. All rituals falling into this category are linked by the making of offerings collectively referred to as bali. In both Sanskrit and Pali the term bali means offering

or oblation with the added connotation that the recipient of the offering is relatively low in the cosmic order.[10] These connotations are carried over into present day Sinhalese ritual practices in which the giving of bali not only implies an offering made to a particular category of beings but a particular type of offering and to a certain extent the mode in which the offering is made. The category of beings to which bali offerings are made falls somewhat below gods (dēviyō) but above demons and spirits. However, certain of the more significant demons are honoured with the dedication of bali images to them. Bali images to Mahā Sohōn, Kālu Kumāraya and Rīri Yakka are frequently dedicated to these demons in ceremonies in which they are believed to be responsible for the patient's disorder.

For the most part, however, bali images are associated with the planets and related phenomena such as the lunar asterisms (nākat) and their overlords. It is in this respect that bali has become a generic term by which rituals connected with the planets have become known. In the case of large scale rituals falling into this category, the name Bali Tovil is given, tovil simply meaning 'ceremony'. Such rituals are characterised by the construction of a number of clay images of the beings involved. To a great extent the term bali has become synonymous with such images, but the term in fact refers to all offerings made in these rituals. There are



said to be thirty-five different types of offering and these include offerings made from cooked rice (bat bali), hand-held clay images of the sun (at-bali) and flower offerings (mal bali).[11] In the case of smaller rituals of this category, the suffix tovil is dropped and they are referred to as Bali Śāntiya or Graha Śāntiya. The term śāntiya means peace and tranquillity, the inculcation of which is one of the main aims of the ritual.

The classification of certain rituals as Śāntiya or Baliya sets them apart from other rituals, not only in name but also in the types of power the specialist invokes and manipulates, and the techniques and styles he employs to do this.[12] In the strict sense of the term the rituals which comprise this category are not exorcisms but deal with a more generalised and non-specific misfortune. In an exorcism ceremony proper, the patient is believed to be affected directly by the excessive attentions of particular demons. The demonic gaze (bāлма) falls onto a person causing him or her to become infused with the essence of the demon (disti). It is these effects, manifest in illness and mental disturbance, which have to be magically removed from the body of the patient through exorcism. The misfortune which the performance of a Bali Tovil is directed against, however, is believed to have arisen through a variety of agents as a result of an unfavourable orientation to the cosmos. In

such a situation the individual has to be purified and fortified in order that he or she might face fate with tranquillity and stoicism. The importance of this state of body and mind is recognised as a virtuous condition in Buddhist philosophy generally.

As mentioned earlier, the appropriate recipients of bali are located somewhere between gods and demons, apparently asserting characteristics of both (cf. Ames 1962:44). Their exact status, however, is far from clear, both in the minds of informants and also in the limited ethnography as it relates to this aspect of the cosmos. The planets who are the main recipients of bali offerings, are referred to by some informants as gods (dēviyō) or godlings (dēvatāva). In keeping with this category they each have their own particular forms, colours, directions of overlordship, vehicles (vāhana), and preferred foods etc. Like the gods, it is believed they can be supplicated and thus in some way influenced. They receive vegetarian offerings (bhōjana) which are relatively pure as distinct from the impure offerings (dōla) given to demons. They also have their own associated mythologies which give descent from humans, usually kings or great sages in ancient India.[13] Whilst these myths do in some instances relate the planets as gods to other gods in the Sinhalese pantheon, the myths are relatively obscure with unfamiliar dramatis personae and motifs of Hindu rather than Buddhist orientation.

The planets as gods, however, do not figure in the morality structure of the Sinhalese pantheon as outlined in Obeyesekere's seminal article on the structure of the Sinhalese pantheon (1962). They have not received varam, authority from the Buddha, the mechanism by which Hindu deities appear to have been assimilated into the Buddhist pantheon, and thus have remained outside of the category of gods proper.

While like the gods the planets are believed to have personal characteristics, they are essentially amoral in the effects they produce. Their benevolence or malevolence arises solely out of their combinations and configurations with respect to the individual. The main deities, on the other hand, are seen as benevolent but do play a punitive role in the overall morality structure of the pantheon and historically in the protection of the Buddhist religion (Buddha sāsanaya).

Unlike many of the gods, the planetary deities, if they can be called that, are not represented in temples, and permanent representations of them are not common. Occasionally people do display in their homes pictures of planets with whom they see themselves as having a special relationship, but this is far from common. In general, I found knowledge concerning the planetary deities to be scant to the point of ignorance, outside of a limited body of specialists. The existence of such specialisation, however, was widely acknowledged.



Although some informants actually treated the planets as deities, others made the distinction between the celestial bodies themselves and the deities having jurisdiction over them. These were known as adipati or overlords. In this case, the term adipati refers to the beings ruling over different portions of the phenomenal universe.

Others did not see the planets as having any metaphysical status whatsoever, believing there to be only the celestial bodies themselves with a force entirely natural and 'scientific'.

Moving from the level of ideas to the level of action however, evidence would suggest that the planets are treated as if they were lower order deities. They are propitiated by low caste mediators, ordinary Sinhala with some Sanskrit is used as the language of mediation, the rituals are accompanied by elaborate performances using dance, drumming and song and the offerings presented are distinct from the offerings made to the gods (pūjā) and to the demons (dōla).

From the discussion above it would appear that to a considerable extent the planets and related phenomena lie outside the Sinhalese pantheon as it has come to be understood as a coherent system embracing elements of both Hindu and Buddhist origin. This is not to say, however, that they are wholly disconnected. The pantheon as described by Obeyesekere (1962) deals primarily with the

relationship between a linear hierarchy of gods and their areas of jurisdiction, on the one hand, and the political hierarchy, centred on the king and the administrative and territorial divisions within the feudal state, on the other. The planets, however, have little to do with questions of space and dominion, but rather relate to matters of time and temporality. The planets and related phenomena are important in understanding the way in which the Sinhalese pantheon operates in and through time, and comes to have certain effects on individuals at certain times. All the various forces at work in the cosmos operate in time; astrology provides a matrix whereby these various forces can be understood and hence acted upon. In the section which follows, the nature of the relationship between astrology and the various forces believed to control what might be called fate is explored, and the ways in which these forces are articulated into a coherent system of belief examined.

#### 5.4 Astrology and the cosmos

It is in times of personal misfortune and suffering that the questioning and analysis of the various forces believed to be at work in the cosmos is at its most intense, and the relationships between these forces rendered explicit. How the main forces believed to determine personal fate operate through space and time, both upon one another and upon the individual, will now be

elaborated.

All misfortune and suffering can be traced back to karma, the law of moral causation. Knowledge of this fact for a Buddhist, however, provides little relief in itself because karma is an imprecise and abstract force which takes effect over long and unspecified periods. Karma is a fundamental and inviolable law which underlies the condition of all living things. Even the gods will one day be reborn on earth and the demons, through an incremental process of birth and rebirth, will rise from their despicable condition and ultimately arrive at the possibility of freedom from rebirth (nirvāṇa or nibbāṇa). In terms of cause and effect, karma represents the outermost ring of causality, the ultimate reference point with respect to an individual's present condition. Occasionally discussed in pseudo-academic terms, karma remains a distant and abstract force with respect to misfortune and its causes. One of the few instances where this is not the case is in the event of sudden death or tragedy, particularly in youth or childhood. In such cases karma is likely to be invoked as an explanation of somebody else's misfortune, rather as we might say 'bad luck' (cf. Pocock 1973:38); it is unlikely that a person would explain their own misfortune using the notion of karma. Where sudden death has taken place there is no time to speculate on intermediate causal agents; there can be no taking stock of the more immediate



forces responsible as there might be in more protracted cases of misfortune and suffering. A person has died because of the state of his or her karma and there is nothing that can be done in the face of this.

It is one's karma that determines when, where and in what state one is born (or rather reborn). The instant of birth, recorded and reified in the horoscope, marks the individual for life, plotting a unique trajectory and transforming impersonal karma into an individual set of possibilities and potentials. The astrological system and the planets mediate between karma and the individual. All misfortune could be traced back to the planets (cf. Obeyesekere 1969:175) and it is they that determine the power of an individual, that is, power in the sense of the production of intended effects. An individual's relationship with the planets colours the success or failure of a their interaction with the cosmos in general. The stars and planets give quality to the passage of time, thus, in bad periods they leave the individual susceptible to malevolence from all quarters and in good periods they provide protection for the individual. It is not they that cause the malevolence or benevolence but rather they that allow the possibility of it taking place. Demons, for example, do not act at the behest of the planets but act as 'free will' agents upon individuals (Gombrich 1971:150). The planets as deities are representatives of the amoral forces of nature which

can render an individual prone to demonic attack, with these forces, at a much more abstract level, relating back to karma. One informant illustrated this point by comparing the planets to light-bulbs of different power and seeing the light they emit as their protective power. Following this analogy, it would be better to have a dim light close overhead than the most powerful lightbulb shining a mile away. If the latter were the case, a person would be left in the dark and thus susceptible to danger.

The inverse of the above line of reasoning could be equally applied with respect to the relationship between men and gods. In times when the planets are strong the benevolence of the gods is more likely to flow, manifesting itself in health and good fortune. Similarly, a person's interaction with other people on a day to day basis is more likely to be fruitful and positive when the planets are well disposed.

The fundamental importance of the astrological system as a mediator between abstract fate and the more immediate agents responsible for bringing it to fruition, is not a new idea, but one which has been recognised for quite some time. For example, in a seventeenth century formulation Knox (1681) tells us:

'It is a usual saying and very frequent among them (if their graha, which is their fortune, be bad) what can god do against it: Nay, I have often heard them say, Give him no sacrifice, but shit in his mouth, what a god is he? So slight an estimation have they of their idol gods.'

(quoted in Gombrich 1971:210)

Although I never came across anything quite so extreme as this, it was often the case that varying degrees of attention had to be paid, according to the magnitude of the task at hand, to the time a plea or supplication is made. Such attention may range from simply making sure the act is performed in the right phase of the moon, to the elaborate construction of an auspicious time at which to commence a ritual intended to elicit help or assistance from a particular god. If these factors are taken into consideration the deities are far more likely to respond as intended.

Similarly, the effects of beings lower in the cosmic order, such as demons and spirits, are ameliorated and nullified if one is in a period when the planets are favourably oriented. In such periods it is said that 'evil has no drawing power' (dos adinnē nā). But the inverse is also true and the slightest of malevolent intentions from either man or demon may strike with devastating effect in times when the planets afford little protection.

At a more mundane level the planets can ensure protection in the face of misfortune of a more natural kind. 'if the time of the planets be good, then even if you are dashed against a rock you will not be killed' (graha kal hoñda nam gale gahalavat maranna bā).

Individuals move through time which has both positive



and negative qualities. These qualities are knowable through astrology and can throw light upon the operation of other more tangible forces in the cosmos. It is important to remember, however, that for most of the time, most people are not always consulting their horoscopes and do not worry too deeply about their susceptibility to the many forms that misfortune might take, although without doubt such considerations do figure significantly in the consciousness of Sinhalese people.

A 'normal' life with its ups and downs, does not prompt any special questioning or searching. It is when life is abnormal in that it appears to be composed entirely of 'downs' that action is prompted. When things go well it can be assumed that the cosmos is favourably oriented towards the individual: karma is good, the planets are protective, the gods are well disposed and the malevolence of demons and men is of no consequence. Such an alignment of forces facilitates achievement, both spiritual and worldly. However, the experience of protracted misfortune and suffering is more likely to prompt an individual to probe and search for causes and an answer to the question 'why me?'.

In seeking an answer to this question Sinhalese people have at their disposal an extensive system of related spheres of specialisation and associated philosophies. Indeed, the existence of ranks of healers and curers, both lay and specialist, all prepared to offer the benefit of

their experience in the face of what might be construed as national hypochondria, appears to be an important characteristic of Sinhalese culture.

The interpretation of disorder, whether physical, social or psychological, may involve reference to one or a number of these different levels or realms of specialisation. Action may be initiated at different levels simultaneously or in sequence as the complexity of a disorder unfolds. A staunch Buddhist may face fate with calm and stoicism, accepting karma and its consequences without any attempt to ameliorate its more tangible and immediate manifestations. On the other hand, the more anxious majority have at their disposal a multiplicity of actions such as charms, amulets, avoidances, supplications, prayers, exorcisms, chants etc. all of which act on the 'free will' agents of the cosmos and also require the services of particular specialists.

It is unlikely that anyone will have such a catholic approach to misfortune that they would seek relief at all levels of the complex array of possible ritual actions, yet the difficult question of exactly into which realm an individual refers a disorder or misfortune is far from understood. [14]

Decisions to employ this or that specialist are undoubtedly related to class and social status which is in turn related to the victims' own personal classification of misfortune, certain beliefs and actions being appropriate

to particular classes and categories of people. For example, there are currently strong beliefs relating to sorcery and the evil eye (Ās vaha) amongst the Sinhala speaking entrepreneurial classes. In the South in particular, competition in this sector is fierce, with jealousy and the fear of supernatural sabotage never far from the surface. Successful businessmen, the mudalālis, are often customers of the Beravā, requesting amulets and talismans for personal protection and ceremonies to deflect the malign attentions of their competitors. Likewise, many poor rural villagers live in perennial fear of demonic attack, observing elaborate superstitions to avoid affliction.

The selection of one course of interpretation and action rather than another is further influenced by straightforward economic factors in that at each level of specialisation money has to be spent. To approach a certain misfortune on all the channels available in Sinhalese culture would be inordinately expensive. To a large extent, rituals have to work, and once meaningful interpretation of a condition has been made and effective action taken, questions of causation and further elaboration will not be probed deeper. However, where resolution is not found, analysis, interpretation and action may be elaborated and reformulated as the individual moves through different realms of ritual discourse.



The following case study illustrates the way in which the search for relief to a particular condition evolved, and was finally resolved, having brought into play an unusually large number of different realms of specialisation. The case in question concerned a wealthy mudalāli who had received a prediction, based on his horoscope, that he would pass through a period in which the configuration of the planets was so dire that he would probably die as a result of it!

#### 5.4.1. The man destined to die

The mudalāli, an established dealer in rice and milling machinery, had developed a pain in the right side of his abdomen. In his search for relief he had visited several doctors ranging from local doctors through to a specialist in a Colombo hospital. After each diagnosis the mudalāli had gone further afield seeking a more considered opinion and spending increasing amounts of time and money in the pursuit of a meaningful explanation and cure. After eight months the disorder had still not abated but had become a more generalised condition. Eventually diabetes was diagnosed and attributed in part to the large number of drugs and medicines that he had consumed in the preceding months. It was at this point that the mudalāli's family took his horoscope to a local schoolteacher who also practised astrology. The schoolteacher, after carefully examining the horoscope,

announced that, commencing on the 17th December 1979 the mudalāli would pass through six days of planetary combinations so dire that he would be unlikely to survive. The predictions understandably shook the mudalāli and he drifted into a deep depression. Resigning himself to the inevitability of his fate, he took steps to divide his estate between his children, handing over each portion signed and endorsed with a fifty-cent stamp. Outstanding debts were cleared and he braced himself for the fateful period.

The schoolteacher did, however, make several suggestions which, if followed carefully, would give some chance of survival and particularly if he could last past the 23rd December, after which time the negative influences would gradually subside. The teacher's recommendations were as follows:

A poem of blessing (set kavi) was to be composed and recited for the god Viṣṇu by a person skilled in the art of set kavi. Unfortunately, this particular request could not be complied with because in order for the poem to be effective at all it had to be performed in the first half of the lunar month in which the moon is waxing (pūrapakṣa). It is only in this period that auspicious acts can be performed and conversely, it is in the period of the waning moon (avapakṣa) that bad acts, such as vas kavi, literally 'poison poems', are performed. In the period between the teacher making his

predictions and the dreaded December 17th, there was not a waxing moon and so this particular line of action had to be abandoned.

Secondly, a pirit ceremony was to be performed in which, ideally, a group of Buddhist monks would come to the house on the 20th, 21st, and 22nd December in order to chant Buddhist scriptures. The priests selected to carry out the pirit were to be pious and devoted. If for some reason priests could not be summoned and the ritual had to be performed by laymen (gihi pirit) then it was imperative that they were 'clean' and observers of the Five Precepts (rā bona minissu ganna epā - 'don't take men who drink toddy').

A protective talisman (yantraya) was to be drawn up and intoned over 1000 times (ek dahas vara japa kirīma). The yantraya was specifically intended to combat the malevolent influence of the planet Saturn (Senasuru aphaḷaya) one of the primary causes of the mudalāli's misfortune. The Śani Mrutunjaya Yantraya, as the talisman was called, was to be carefully constructed, charmed and tied to the mudalāli's body. Furthermore, he was advised to wear blue clothes throughout the period in question, blue being the colour of Viṣṇu and Saturn, and as such an act of reverence to both.

Finally, the mudalāli was told to proceed with extreme caution throughout the period and not to invite catastrophe by careless action.



Despite the hope offered by the schoolteacher, the mudalāli remained obsessed with the idea of his own demise. It was at this point that the family of the mudalāli took the horoscope to an exorcist friend of mine who in turn brought the case to my attention because he felt it might have been of interest from a 'professional' point of view. This exorcist, also an accomplished astrologer, examined the horoscope and visited the mudalāli. Subsequently, he made a somewhat different interpretation of the horoscope than the schoolteacher. It was true that the mudalāli was going through a bad period and could expect little in the way of success or good fortune but there was nothing to suggest that the period would be terminal. All the key characteristics indicating fatality in a horoscope were absent. Despite attempts to reassure the mudalāli he remained resigned to his fate.

As a panacea for the problems, real and imaginary, which beset the mudalāli the exorcist suggested that he be allowed to perform a Suniyam, a ceremony for the cutting of sorcery. No sorcery as such was suspected and the ritual was performed, in the words of the exorcist, "to set everything right" (okkotama hari yanna). As mentioned above, this ceremony is also known as a śāntiya, a ceremony for the bestowal of blessings, peace and tranquillity, which in view of the victim's disturbed condition was deemed highly appropriate.

On the 15th December a troupe assembled for the performance of a full-scale Suniyam which was organised and conducted by my exorcist friend. The fateful period passed without incident and, although badly shaken, the mudalāli gradually returned to normality.

It is against such an array of competing interpretations and alternative courses of action that we must view the Bali Tovil. It is one of a number of possible actions that can be taken in the face of misfortune. Indeed, it would have been quite appropriate for a Bali Tovilayak to have been performed in the case of the mudalāli. In the final analysis it was a man who was unable to perform Bali Tovil but was an acknowledged master of Suniyam who took responsibility for the patient's welfare. The condition was interpreted from the standpoint of his specialist realm of knowledge and ability, and action taken which was consistent with this. The astrological dimension was played down and the cutting of sorcery and blessing of the patient were brought to the fore.

#### 5.5 Astrology and the Bali Tovil

It is now perhaps an appropriate point to return more specifically to Bali Tovil and some of the more tangible mechanisms underlying their production and performance. Astrology plays a fundamental role in this process and it

is thus necessary to have some understanding of this complex system and the actions which are based upon it. The connection between Bali Tovil and astrology stems primarily from the belief that from birth to death an individual is passing through periods (dasā) over which certain planets have rulership. The duration of these periods can be known by reference to the horoscope, as can the planetary movements and configurations within the period. Basing his inferences upon the configurations and movements of the planets within certain periods, an astrologer can make predictions and assessments of what the period holds for an individual; the extent of good fortune and the severity of misfortune. The periods can be broken down into ever more precise divisions of time, like wheels within wheels, each having particular qualities, good, bad and indifferent.

It is unlikely that people have any precise awareness of the periods through which they are going but it is not uncommon for people to take their horoscopes routinely to an astrologer for general fortune telling. The astrologer in such cases can be of any caste, but if the astrologer is of a high caste it is unlikely that he will have the means to act in the face of misfortune arising as a result of a bad planetary period. 'Good' astrologers are normally of high caste and are of high standing in the local community. They carry out what can be conveniently called 'maintenance astrology', that is, astrology which



relates to action and events which have to be pre-empted in order to ensure a safe and trouble-free passage through life. In this category can be included activities such as constructing horoscopes (janma patra yodanavā), finding auspicious times (nākat soyanavā) for events such as the first eating of rice (bat kāvīmā) the first learning of letters (ākuru kiyavīmā) etc. matching horoscopes for compatibility at marriage (porondam balanavā) etc. Beravā are undoubtedly competent in these various activities but only rarely are they called upon to perform these works for persons outside their own caste. Where Beravā astrologers play a fundamental role is in dealing with problems which may arise directly from an examination of a horoscope. In keeping with the theme developed in the first chapter, Beravā services are employed where there is a breakdown or potential breakdown in order, that is, when people become ill or beset with bad-luck.

Amongst the Beravā the knowledge of astrology is closely allied with the wherewithal to perform a variety of rituals intended to relieve misfortune arising from bad planetary configurations. High caste astrologers often express disinterest or even disgust at these more elaborate and exotic means of combatting misfortune. However, in my experience, they do not discourage people if they do place faith in such procedures despite the fact that they themselves do not possess the power to act as the Beravā do.

It is in times of protracted misfortune that a Beravā astrologer will be sought for advice and action. One of the things he will do in such a case is look for the existence of good and bad periods, a process called 'explaining the fruitful and fruitless periods' (phalāphala vistara kiyanavā). It is when a 'fruitless period' (aphala kālaya) is located that an astrologer is most likely to recommend some alleviating action. As well as establishing the duration and severity of the aphala kālaya he will also give suggestions as to the agents who will be more directly responsible for misfortune in such a period.

The determination of different periods by an astrologer is carried out by examining the horoscope. An explication of the contents of a Sinhalese horoscope along with an account of the technical aspects of calculating planetary periods is given in Appendix III at the end of the thesis. It is worthwhile emphasising that the location of a 'fruitless period' does not in itself determine the nature of misfortune but rather that in such periods a person is susceptible, vulnerable, and prone to unfavourable effects from all quarters. The individual lies at the centre of a kaleidoscope of forces of causation; the temporal dimension which astrology provides gives the means to see order in the emergent patterns of effects of these forces.

### 5.6 The Bali Tovil: the alleviation of misfortune

Bali Tovil and related rituals provide one of the few courses of action which can be taken in the face of misfortune, actual or impending, which explicitly acknowledges the underlying significance of astrology. As a possible solution to the loss of personal power, Bali Tovil can be seen to state an individual's relationship with his or her fate. It is important to stress that this relationship cannot be altered. The configuration of the planets can no more be altered than can night be changed into day. What can be altered, however, is the state of the individual vis a vis the wider cosmos. In view of the susceptibility of an individual to the 'free will' agents at work in the cosmos during a bad planetary period, it is possible to appease and acknowledge these agents in order to ameliorate their effects. In certain periods, certain things are likely to happen as a result of certain actions and agents. There can be little precision about the form that these 'certain things' might take, only an awareness of proneness and a desire to be prepared. This whole idea is summed up neatly in a metaphor put forward by one informant who stated that if it looks like rain one is wise to take an umbrella. Taking an umbrella does not stop the rain but in the face of what looks like the inevitable, one can achieve a degree of protection.

The Bali Tovil provides just such an umbrella against



the deluge of misfortune one might expect during the stormy passage of a bad planetary period. Throughout the ritual there is a concerted effort to minimise all that is negative and liable to attract malign and destructive attention while simultaneously maximising the positive aspects of the patient's experience.

#### 5.6.1. The cleansing of dos and the nullification of evil

One of the main objectives of the Bali Tovil is to ritually cleanse the patient, and to effect this, attempts are made throughout the night to remove all flaws and blemishes (dos) such as sickness, mental upset and sins, all of which might attract negative attentions. Extensive recitations of praises to the Buddha and the gods, and the relation of episodes from the Buddha's lives are intended to bring to mind (matak kirīma) the goodness and virtue of the Buddha in order that the patient might be fortified and the dos driven out of body and mind. This wholesale removal of blemishes and flaws takes place primarily in poems known as sirasapāda, which means literally 'head to foot' poems. These are sung over the patient in order to force the dos down through the body and eventually out through the toes. Closely related to the sirasapāda is another type of verse called the kaṭapāhādiya which give a detailed breakdown of the body and its constituents in order that the dos adhering to each separate part can

be dealt with precisely and effectively. Similarly, relief is requested from long lists of diseases, each precisely named, from which the patient might be suffering.

In times of negative planetary influence, malevolence can be incurred from human and non-human agents (manuṣya and amanuṣya) as the inevitable consequence of human action. Most of the time action and its supernatural consequences are disregarded but in times of vulnerability and susceptibility such malevolence can have inordinate consequences as sickness and fear grip the individual. A concern with the consequences of bad actions, be they intentional or unintentional, is reflected in the ritual, in the recitation of numerous verses which deal with the removal of dos arising from action. These poems, known as set kavi and āśīrvāda kavi or blessing poems, consist of versified lists of actions, omens and disordered events all of which might have attracted negative attentions and their unfortunate consequences to the patient. The actions listed are often those associated with acts of creation or construction in which dos might be incurred as a result of a failure to carry out correct procedures. Alternatively, dos can fall onto a craftsman and his creation as a result of the evil eye (ḥs vaha) attracted to the beauty of a finished item.

Among the category of verses known as set kavi,

requests are made to free the patient from the dos which might fall, for example., as a result of cutting ditches (agal kapā), placing roof tiles (ulun hoyanavā), putting the pinnacle on a Buddhist shrine (kot pala dēva dāgāb pituva), making caskets (karandu), making scribes (pathiṇda) etc. The omens and events referred to in the poems are all indicators of misfortune which, in bad planetary periods, can take on terrifying significance. For example, if the hearthstone shatters (gē lipigal pālma), if lizards (kaṭussa) or crows (kapuṭa) evacuate their bowels onto the body, or if dogs (balā), rat-snakes (gāradiya) or monitor lizards (kabaragoya) enter the house then it is requested that the dos which results be gone.

Circumstances such as those related above are sung in four line verses each of which ends with a request that the dos be gone. The verbs used in these requests suggest that dos is viewed as a material entity. Requests are made for the dos to go away (yanna), to evaporate or dry up (hiṇḍanna), to be up-rooted (igili), to be cast out (duruveyi), to be shattered (bhaṅga) etc. as the patient is cleared from head to foot of all possible sources of dos.

As stated in the first chapter, the Beravā, in many of their traditional activities, find themselves associated with dos in various forms. The removal of dos, its expulsion and absorption onto auspicious objects is a



theme central to the aim and intent of Bali Tovil. The means employed to do this, however, are by no means peculiar to this ritual alone. They are in fact found in many other ritual complexes and are drawn from a mythico-symbolic repertoire which extends back into the history of the wider Indian sub-continent. For example, the highly auspicious symbols which fill the Bali ritual arena, such as rounded clay pots (purna kalasa), lamps (pahan), leaves (kola), flowers (mal) and cloths (udu viyana) are drawn from a wider repertory of symbols connected with blessing and purification. In the course of the ritual, these symbolically laden objects serve to absorb malevolence and emit benevolence as the balance is ritually redressed and good comes to predominate over evil.

A crucial symbolic construction in this process is the aṭa magala, an eight-sided magical diagram, which has the expressed purpose of absorbing dos on ritual occasions. For example, Seneviratne (1978:104) in his description of events leading up to the Kandy Parahara describes the (aṭa magala) as a diagram drawn on the floor in front of the gaze of various gods. In this position it operates as an auspicious object and

'...is thus made to 'absorb' the glance of the god (which though not 'evil' is too dangerous for human eyes to be directly exposed to), and then destroyed.'

(loc cit)

The events which precede the Pārahāra are referred to

as the Valiyak dance and serve as a means of 'counteracting the possible evils (dos) of the pārahāra performance' (ibid). Seneviratne is able to draw clear parallels between the ritual episodes enacted before the pārahāra and a myth which tells how King Panduvas was afflicted by a mental disturbance and skin disease as a result of the malign attentions of Kuvēni, Vijaya's queen (ibid 105-108). In the myth, Panduvas was subsequently cured using symbols and ritual techniques which, significantly, are similar to many of those used in Bali Tovil. In both instances the aim is broadly similar, that is, to anticipate and avert malevolent attention from whatever quarter.

As with the myth of Panduvas' affliction cited by Seneviratne in which he is eventually cured of a 'psychosomatic' illness, so, in the Bali Tovil it is diseases and disorders which often fall outside of any straightforward classification which are addressed in the ritual.

Underlying the idea of removing dos from the patient is a subtle awareness of the psychological dimensions of many disorders. Fear (bhaya) plays an important role in the development of confusion and the subsequent investment of reality in phenomena which are illusory and for the most part of little or no consequence. Once again we return to a key theme within the ritual, that is to calm and tranquillise

the patient. Such an approach is entirely consistent with a wider Buddhist world-view, for as in the myths cited at the beginning of this chapter in which the power of goodness, that is the Buddha, is able to disarm and nullify the power of evil. so, in the Bali Tovil, goodness incarnate in the person of the Buddha provides the model for the transcendence of illusory perceptions. The moral fortification which the teaching of the Buddha can bring is enough to overcome and dispel the mental and physical disturbance which manifests itself in the form of troublesome demons and spirits.

Significantly, this attitude is one to be found in the poems of the fifteenth century which are cited by informants as amongst the original texts upon which the Bali Tovil are based. For example, in verse 307 of Budugunāṅkārā (Reynolds 1970:269-270) Vidāgama states:

'He does not let sorrow or suffering enter  
the hearts of people who remember his name,  
and he was created and destined that his  
birth should be a salve to bring healing for  
all ills.'

Such ideas concerning the relationship between personal suffering, the supernatural forces which are often believed to be its cause and the solution provided by Buddhist philosophy are widespread throughout the Buddhist tradition. For example, talking of Sherpa rituals, Ortnner tells us:

'The Buddhist point is that while these  
beings appear objective and external to



the ignorant individual, they are really aspects of the self. High level Buddhist meditation and teaching is aimed at achieving an understanding of this point, and at defeating demons by teaching to control, 'quiet' and ultimately eliminate these interior impulses. Controlling the demons is thus, for high adepts, not a matter of external ritual actions, but of concentration and self control.'

(Ortner 178:99)

The Bali Tovil are decidedly not rituals of 'high adepts' but neither are they aberrant folk expressions of the 'little tradition'. The Bali Tovil represents a popular expression of ideas relating to suffering and misfortune which are cognate with a wider Buddhist attitude towards sickness and disorder. The mythico-ritual repertoire found in the Bali Tovilaya has developed over many years and relates back to many of the earliest myths dealing with sickness and affliction, incorporating actions and symbols of great antiquity and significance. In a manner characteristic of many Sinhalese healing rituals, both patient and audience are confronted in a Bali Tovilayak with layer upon layer of 'key' symbols and actions which give each performance a deep resonance and transformative potential. Against an astrological backdrop, which highlights and legitimates the causes of personal suffering, the ritual acknowledges a person's condition and seeks to strengthen and fortify them magically and morally in the face of amoral nature. The patient's condition is progressively framed as acknowledgement is made of the ideal or accepted order of

the cosmos, that is with the Buddha in the primary position, with the gods in a secondary position and so on down to the demons and spirits. Unlike in any other healing ritual, the patient is expected to sit in the same position throughout a Bali Tovilayak, as he or she is progressively re-centred within a cosmic order which the performers unfold.

#### 5.6.11. The specificity of the Bali Tovil

For the Beravā the Bali Tovil represents the uppermost limit of their contribution within the overall division of ritual labour in Sinhalese society.[15] The rituals are by far the most complex and demanding of all the ones they perform. They are demanding not so much in terms of the physical exertions needed, although these can be great, but rather in terms of the mental capabilities required by each performer. Unlike other rituals performed by the Beravā, Bali Tovil are virtually tailor-made for each individual case. A Mahā Sohōna Samayama, for example, changes little in its form and content from performance to performance, but a Bali Tovilayak is organised according to the patient's condition and the forces most likely to impinge on his or her life. Small rituals, such as the at-bali, in which hand-held clay images of the sun are moved around the patient's head, are relatively standard in their content. However, the larger the rituals become, the greater is their specificity to the patient's

condition and the more precisely is this condition explicated and defined. The smallest ritual is one in which an altar (mal baliya) consisting of nine squares (nava gāba mal baliya), one for each of the planets, is constructed and offerings of rice placed into each of the receptacles accompanied by appropriate recitations. The size and elaboration of the ritual can be increased with the altar having twenty-five squares (visi-pas gāba mal baliya) and eighty-one squares (asu-ek gāba mal baliya); each of the additional squares having its own particular cosmic referent. Where the requirement is for a ritual which involves more than just the mal baliya, varying numbers of clay images are introduced into the ritual. The smallest ritual involving clay images is the tun-baliya, three offerings, in which a clay image is placed on either side of the eighty-one squared mal baliya. This pattern can be progressively augmented placing two (pas bali tovil), three (hat bali tovil), four (nava bali tovil) images on either side of the mal baliya up to a maximum of seventeen, which is the largest ritual that can theoretically be performed, the pan tis baliya, or thirty-five offerings. Larger rituals thus have as their centre-piece a symmetrical line of images with the eighty-one squared mal baliya at their centre.

In formal terms the size of the ritual is directly linked to the individuality of the patient and the



misfortune being suffered, but furthermore, in purely social terms, as we saw in Chapter 4 (4.5) larger rituals are also expressions of individuality in that they are indexically linked to role and status in the ordinary world. This link can be seen in the now legendary tale of the pan tis baliya performed at Māragoda back in the twenties. This mammoth ritual, the last of its kind to be performed in the South, was performed at the behest of a local business man and drew together performers from all over the province. The business man had insisted, against the advice of the organiser, that the biggest ritual was to be performed, involving the thirty-five offerings, over twenty dancers and taking three days and nights to perform. Doubt was cast on the wisdom of putting on such a performance because it is believed that a ritual of this size is only appropriate to royalty, 'a ruler of the world' (lokādipati). The fears of the organiser were borne out and the event proved a disaster. Half way through the proceedings the patient went missing and was eventually found wandering senseless, a mile from his home. After the ritual, far from receiving blessings and good-fortune, the businessman was ruined, various family members went mad and met untimely deaths and, so the story goes, his derelict house still stands as testimony to the powers that were unleashed on that fateful occasion.

In this salutary tale, the patron over-reached himself, the powers evoked were inordinately great and

came to have an adverse effect. However, the tale does demonstrate the connection between ritual size and the elaboration of an individual's place within the cosmos on the one hand and social position and status on the other. Greater expenditure on the size of the ritual increases the size and duration of the social space created around the ritual. Augmentation of ritual in terms of size, complexity and elaboration necessarily carries with it a concomitant elaboration of the audience, and hence the community as the patient perceives it, or wishes to perceive it.

For the performers, a large ritual brings the difficult task of matching the particularities of the patient's astrological condition and life circumstances with a range of deities and demons whose propitiation will help to cancel out the negative influences which might beset the patient during a bad planetary period (see Appendix IV for an illustration of the considerations made in selecting the images).

From what one baliādura described as a 'science without limit' (simāvak nāti śastrayak), the organiser of a Bali Tovilayak must select appropriate recitations and offerings to be given in the ritual. There are said to be 13,200 images (rūpaya) alone, each with their own descriptive poems and accompanying prayers and dedications. Not surprisingly, the power of retention (dharana śaktiya) is a recognised quality amongst

baliḥdurā who in some cases can recite quite literally for days on end. Each baliḥdurā has a repertoire of deities and demons from all sections of the cosmos each of which he knows how to construct in clay and dedicate with appropriate recitations.

It is not simply the breadth of knowledge and skill which each performance of a Bali Tovilayak entails that gives it its elevated position in the repertoire of Beravā rituals, there are also important moral considerations. Given that many of the recitations relate to the Buddha: praises, salutations and stories from his life, the attitude of the performers is highly relevant. Performers themselves are expected to be good Buddhists, observers of the Five Precepts and pure in body. They should bathe and apply sandalwood to the body before each performance, paying special attention to the mouth and teeth which, if polluted, by smoking or chewing betel, might render the sacred and magical words they utter powerless. This accent on bodily purity and morality is in profound distinction to the preparations for a yak tovil in which the specialists involved will often take stimulants, such as alcohol or ganja, in order to heighten ecstatic states and attract the presence of demons.

The particular style and content of the Bali Tovilaya makes it appropriate for application in a wide variety of social circumstances. For example, it is quite acceptable to perform these rituals for a Buddhist priest. This is



in stark contrast to exorcisms proper which, on the rare occasions when they are performed for priests, are performed in great secrecy. Similarly, Bali Tovil can be performed for local dignitaries and high government officials without fear of comment or criticism. Out of all the rituals performed by the Beravā, the Bali Tovil, in view of its elevated content and easily augmented and elaborated structure, is possibly the most appropriate ritual they have for demonstrating indexical links between the ritual realisation of the cosmos on the one hand, and the purely temporal interests of their patrons in terms of status and social position which arise from such performances, on the other.

Sadly, however, major performances of Bali Tovil appear to be on the decline as specialists in this most difficult field pass on without having 'made' good pupils. Similarly, the opportunities upon which this most elegant ritual technology can be put into action are being transplanted by more expedient and cheaper modes of action. But, as I hope to illustrate in the next chapter, the Bali Tovilaya does still provide a fascinating insight into the practical operation of beliefs and ideas concerning ritual action and its efficacy.

#### Notes to Chapter 5

[1] For example, Gombrich (1971:340) in his glossary gives bali as follows: 'a ceremony for exorcising evil planetary influences; an image of a planet used in such a ceremony'.

[2] The only article devoted specifically to the Baliya is by Da Silva (1911) in which he gives a description of some of the more salient features of the ritual. Wirz (1954:105-128) provides brief accounts of the subject but the scope of the topic renders his accounts unsystematic and ill-explained. Yalman (1964:122-123) gives a brief account of a bali tovil performed in the village of Teripehe.

[3] Kemper (1979) and Hodge (1981:228:274) are notable exceptions in this field. Both provide useful data on the social aspects of Sinhalese astrology. Fuller (1980) provides interesting information in a technical article concerning astrology in South India.

[4] For example, Eliade (1959:79-80) refers to the Vedic fire altar as 'time materialised', an excellent description of the mal baliya used as the centre-piece in the Bali Tovil. In both its form and its function the mal baliya is to a degree cognate with the Vedic altar.

[5] Malalasekera (1960 vol. II:779) gives a full account of this once powerful dynasty and their city of Vesali (ibid:940) as found in the Pali commentaries.

[6] In some instances the/sages are given the somewhat confusing title of munidu, an appellation normally given to the Buddha. The verse given below could quite easily be taken to mean that the Buddha (or a Buddha) was the originator of the ritual!

seta kala mula diyana  
ape munidu sada siri mata  
veda visal pura veta  
desu at-bali palamu mesirita.

with peace on the first day  
our most blessed sage  
went to VisalPura,  
and taught the first at bali.

[7] Wirz (1954:107) recounts an origin myth of the Bali which goes back to the affliction of king Maha Sammata a mythical king of Sri Lanka. Interestingly, these myths also overlap with the myths of origin of the Suniyam ceremony in which it is Maha Sammata's Queen, Menikpāla who is the victim of a sorcery. As in the story of the affliction of the Liccavi Prince, it is Vasavāti Mārya who is attributed with the deed.

[8] For example, A.S. Pīno (B4, see page 156) was nicknamed 'Golu Yakdesa', 'the dumb exorcist'. He earned this name on the occasion when he was caught by a

government official cutting down trees in a private wood. When hauled before the local government agent he acted like a deaf mute and was subsequently released.

[9] I would tentatively suggest that the paradox in question is dramatised in an episode in the Suniyam ceremony called the Vadiga Patunaya (cf. Wirz 1954:73, Saraccandra 1966:45-46 and Raghavan 1967:107-114). The drama enacts the arrival of seven Brahmins from the port of Vadiga in North India. The story tells of a book (patunaya = index or collection) which came into the hands of the Vadiga ascetics on the day Gautama attained enlightenment. On that day the ascetics performed a ritual (yāgaya) to cure the afflicted Prince Malsara.

The drama of the Vadiga Patunaya in the Suniyam enacts the arrival of the Brahmins in full Brahmin attire. However, they are unable to communicate with those they meet at the ritual because a lingua franca cannot be found. After much punning and comic drama the Brahmins (using a dancer as mediator), communicate to the drummer in the ritual who they are and why they have come. They are then able to employ their skills to cure the patient.

[10] In the Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, bali is given as: 'any offering or propitiatory oblation (especially offerings of food such as grain, rice etc. to certain gods, semi-divine beings, household divinities, spirits, men, birds, other animals and all creatures, including even lifeless objects.'

In the Davis and Stede (P.T.S.) Pali-English Dictionary, bali is given simply as 'religious offering or oblation particularly to subordinate divinities.'

[11] Although thirty-five types of offering (pan tis bali) are frequently mentioned, the entire list is now lost and those currently given are somewhat obscure. Nevill (1955 vol. III:294) gives the following: creeper (vel), flower (mal), cloth (kada), hand (at), winnow (kulu), rice (bat), clay (māti) planets (graha) and age ? (yuga and vayasata himi). My informants added sand (vāli), flour or dough (mānsaya) and pulp (madulu) to this list.

[12] The Suniyam is also referred to as the Suniyam Sāntiya (also called the Hat Adī Sāntiya or Menikpāla Sāntiya) which employs many techniques and episodes similar to those of the Bali.

[13] Barnett, for example, gives the mythology of the sun god, Iru Dēviyō (1910:32).

[14] Beals (1976) investigates decision making strategy with respect to native curers in South India, presenting interesting data on the appropriateness of certain



practitioners to tackle certain disorders.

[15] Although the Bali Tovil is completely dominated by the Beravā in much of the island, the ritual is also associated with the Oli or Potter caste in certain areas.

## CHAPTER 6

## BALI TOVIL: THE STAGING OF AN EVENT

6.1 Ritual sequence and structure

Whatever the size of a Bali Tovil performed, the general procedure is always the same. The patient is located in a positively charged space, surrounded by auspicious symbols and brought into connection magically, by means of a thread, with representatives of deities and demons from whom the power of protection and blessing is requested to flow. Concurrent with the positive charging of the patient goes the removal of any blemishes (dos) which might attract negative attentions. The patient is made to experience an intensely positive time and space before being moved back into ordinary time and space.

In general terms all sizes of Bali Tovil follow a three-fold structure which corresponds to a 'tri-partite movement in space-time' (Turner 1974:13), in which the patient undergoes periods of separation/segregation, limen/transition and re-aggregation/incorporation as in

the classical anthropological paradigm identified by Van Gennep in the structure of rites of passage. In larger performances of the Bali Tovil these three phases can be clearly identified by distinctive actions, styles of performance, modes of discourse and bodily movements, as well as from more obvious indicators such as the purely temporal punctuation of the ritual process.

The movement of the patient through these three phases is not so much a physical movement as a cognitive one, in which thought and emotion are intensified through the revelation and elaboration of the significance of the objects and actions which constitute the ritual.

In the first phase, the scene is set, the patient is introduced in to a pre-constructed ritual arena. He is separated from the mundane world and is seen to be so by the audience. There is a progressive and sequential introduction to the objects to be used in the ritual both through their descriptions in verse and through multi-sensory contact; the patient is instructed to see, feel, touch, hear and smell certain things. Simultaneously, the power of the images is activated and invoked. Both they and the patient are gradually transformed into a state of maximum preparedness.

In the second phase the activated power of the deities and demons represented in the various images is channelled onto the patient. Requests are made for relief, offerings are made and the patient has all possible sources of



affliction removed. Contact with the powers evoked is at its most intense as the lengthy recitations unfold in recursive loops and reiterations of the basic theme: maximising the auspicious and minimising the inauspicious in order to ameliorate the inevitable consequences of fate as revealed through astrology.

The third phase entails the separation of the patient from the ritual space, a rapid denouement, in which the patient is returned to the world of everyday meanings. The ritual stage, at the centre of which the patient briefly found himself, is dismantled with a speed and matter of factness hardly credible given its meticulous creation over many hours. He is returned to actuality with a jolt.

Performers divide their own performances up according to named sequences and actions which provide them with the 'bare bones' of the ritual. The lists of actions which performers provide as the essential constituents of a particular ritual may vary considerably from individual to individual. The list given below indicates the way in which the constituent components of the Bali Tovil, given by one performer, fit into the tri-partite structure outlined above. They represent key components of a major performance, others could be added for a more elaborate performance.

Phase I - Separation: creation and activation of ritual space

1) The sitting of the patient (āturaya vādi vīma):-

The patient is escorted by one of the performers into the arena and installed on a bed or mattress in front of the assembled images.

2) All present take the Five Precepts (pañ'sil):-

The patient, audience and performers affirm their unity as a moral community by taking the Five Precepts, the least that is required of every Buddhist.

3) The Auspicious Drum (magul bera):- Drummers give a rendition of drumming and songs considered auspicious and commonly performed at the opening or inauguration of a ceremony.

4) Charming the incense (dummala mātirīma):- Mantra are intoned over incense which is subsequently used to purify the ritual arena and particularly the various images. The pungent white smoke which the burning of this particular incense creates is also deemed to be highly attractive to deities and demons who cast their gaze (disṭi) upon it.

5) Salutation to the Three Refuges (tun saraṇayata namaskirīma):- Homage is paid to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha: The Teacher, His teaching and the Priesthood. Various verses giving praises to the Triple Gem (tri vidna ratna stōtra) are repeated at the beginning of different sections throughout the ritual.

Reference to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha provides a 'bottom line' from which all other praises and invocations proceed; they are thus framed within the wider context of Buddhism.

6) Śānti Ślōkaya:- A series of Sanskrit couplets are given which introduce the patient to various objects used during the ritual. Sanskrit couplets are often accompanied by Sinhalese verses which tell of the origins of objects such as the bell (gejja), rung throughout the ritual, the thread (kanyā hūya), which attaches the patient to the images, and the curtain (kadaturāva), which obscures the patient's view of the ritual arena in the early phase of the ritual. Nine ślōka are recited for each of the nine planets whose invocation is symbolised by the lighting of nine clay oil lamps.

The recitations and accompanying actions up to this point are usually conducted by one or two ādurā, without musical accompaniment, dance or costume. The completion of verses dedicated to the nine planets marks the end of the first phase.

Phase II - Dedication: the realisation of the power of the deities

7) The dedication of images (bali pāvadīma):- The dedication of each image is comprised of several sub-sections, each consisting of verses and actions appropriate to particular images. The rounds of



recitation are carried out for each image in turn and move from right and left following a fairly standard pattern.

a) Triple gem: each sequence commences with praises to the triple gem.

b) Verses are given, usually a mixture of Sanskrit couplets (ślōka) and ordinary Sinhalese verses (kavi), in which reference is made to various archetypal places and events such as the city of Visala, the Liccavi kings and the afflictions of various mythical figures (see Chapter 5, page 267). Poems (kavi) giving the various ritual prescriptions which came out of these archetypal encounters are recited informing the patient of the mythical sources of the event now being experienced.

c) Bali Vistara Kavi: descriptions in verse are given of each of the images arranged before the patient: their appearance, weapons (āyudha), vehicles (vāhana), colours, the offerings they favour and the disorder for which they will bring relief, are all described in detail. This is followed by a spoken invocation in which the various deities are requested to bless and protect the patient from particular illnesses and conditions. It is during this sequence that various offerings are placed into the mal baliya.

d) Set Kavi[1] or Asirvāda Kavi: Poems of blessing are sung in which reference is made to Jataka stories and events from the Buddha's life. These verses also incorporate requests that dos be removed from the

patient's body and that there be a healthy and prosperous existence in the future. The verses are sung and accompanied by drumming and dancing. The metre and rhythm of the songs is commonly associated with the popular rendition of stories in poetic form.

Set kavi can be included at any point between sections a, b or c and provide a means for performers to expand the length of a particular dedication and bring in special recitations which may be known by only a few performers.

e) Sirasapāda: Each dedication is brought to a close with a special set of verses similar in form to the set kavi. The sirasapāda or 'head to foot' poems, use references to stories and events concerning the Buddha to drive dos down the body (dos basavanavā) from the head down to the feet from where it is removed.

For the most part the ritual is taken up with this middle phase in which rounds of recitation following a pattern similar to that outlined above are sung to the accompaniment of the drum. The recitations continue throughout the night until the early hours when all the images assembled before the patient have been described, activated, dedicated and their power focussed on the patient.

### Phase III - Re-aggregation and the return to reality

8) Bali Samayama: In this final episode the patient

is disconnected from the source of power and taken out of the ritual arena.' The patient performs a number of actions which signify separation: offerings are cast onto the images, the thread is cast back onto the images and likewise the curtain (kadaturāva) which has been used to absorb dos. These actions are intended to close the Bali (bali vahanavā) and mantra are intoned to ensure all malevolence has gone onto the images which are then disposed of.

It is during this phase that the performers provide entertainment in the form of sural, songs and dances in which the performers elicit money from the audience. These dances are often included although they do not have anything to do with the ritual per se. They are included for entertainment and enjoyment but as we shall see they do fulfill an important function in the overall structure of the ritual.

Within the broad tri-partite structure outlined above performers are able to introduce a wide range of recitations and actions which render the content, and to a degree the sequencing, of each particular ritual highly fluid.

In view of the extensive recitations which have come to be associated with the planets in Bali and Śāntiya rituals, the manner of performance of the ritual appears to vary considerably from region to region. My own account and analysis of the Bali Tovil is based on the



experience of two major rituals and a number of smaller ones performed in the Akuressa area.

## 6.2 Ritual event

Having given an account of the underlying structure of the Bali Tovil an attempt will now be made to describe how, in one particular instance, this structure is brought to life in ritual performance. The technique employed to do this will be straight narrative description of a Bali Tovil which I attended. By using this technique it is hoped that some of the integrity of the event as a whole will be preserved, thus conveying some of the sense of occasion which was generated by the ritual. Furthermore, such a description draws attention once again to the duality of ritual referred to in Chapter 4 (p.227). Each ritual performance is at once timeless yet temporal; it seeks to reproduce invariant forms linked to wider cosmic truths, yet each event arises out of the particularities of time and circumstance. Each ritual is inevitably an act of recreation doomed to be an act of creation, and with each act of creation both performers and performance are moved further away from the source with a consequent loss of power for their acts.[2]

The account which follows is based on a ritual in which seven offerings were made (Hat Bali Tovil) on behalf of a man named Piyasena of the Beravā caste. Piyasena had been suffering considerable hardship owing to lack of

business in his trade as a carpenter. He had also had a bad stomach pain which had not responded to any kind of treatment over a number of months and was experiencing a general malaise. Having taken his horoscope to an astrologer he was told he was experiencing the bad effects of the "Great Period of the Sun" (irugē mahā dasāva); he was going through a "fruitless period" (aphala kālaya). Upon hearing of Piyasena's plight, N.P. Babōris, his wife's father, suggested a Bali Tovil be performed and that he be allowed to organise it.

The date for the ritual was set for the 9th September 1979 and was to be performed in Piyasena's village. The troupe which Babōris assembled for the occasion was shown that shown in Figure 14, page 258 :

Dancers:	Wadu Mutta	(D23)
.	N.P. Babōris	(D22)
	B.S. Alson	(E1)
	B.S.G. Odiris	(E2)
	M.A. Leeson	(E11)
Drummers:	K.G. Pedris	(D3)
	H.L.N. Cyril	(E16)

For the event which actually took place a third drummer was added to the troupe formally arranged. The arrival of H.L. Dingōris, a famous local drummer and relation of the patient, at the ritual led to him quickly being cajoled into making the pair of drummers into a trio.

M.A. Leeson, the fifth dancer, although a member of the troupe, was largely absent from the arena during the major part of the performance. He had complained bitterly

of a stomach pain which, he hinted, had arisen because he had not been able to take his daily dose of arrack, without which he could not eat! Leeson did make an appearance later on in the performance when he provided accompaniment in certain of the recitations but he did not lead any of the recitations or image dedications.

In view of the relationships within the troupe, Leeson's abstension from any major responsibilities within the ritual may have also had an element of exclusion. Babōris, Alson and Odiris, who performed the majority of dedications, were closely related and, most importantly, all derived their knowledge from a common teaching source, namely Akurubevili Vidāne. It is quite likely that Leeson just did not know many of the recitations which were performed in the ritual. Waḍu Mutta on the other hand, on account of his seniority, was familiar with many of the recitations that were given and on at least two occasions was left reciting verses which nobody else knew.

News that the ritual was to be performed was conveyed to me by my own informants in Beragoda who insisted that I be present. The ritual was to be a fine one (niyama tovilayak) in which special efforts were to be made on behalf of Baboris's son-in-law. Unlike other occasions when my presence at their ritual performances often created ambiguities, in that I would arrive with the performers yet become part of an audience which was for them anonymous, on this occasion I was viewed as a



positive component in their own sense of community. I, in a sense, had become yet another indexical aspect of the ritual performance.

In view of the kinship link through Babōris, the performers had agreed to waive the bulk of their fees in order that a larger than normally appropriate ritual could be performed. Despite this gesture, however, the ritual still proved to be a very expensive affair, costing in the region of 1000 Rs.

The following narrative is taken directly from my field notes and supplemented by later discussions with the performers; the account is related entirely in the present tense.

By the time of my arrival on the afternoon before the night of the ritual, preparations are well under way. The family conduct their preparations in good humoured panic as the sense of occasion mounts. A party atmosphere prevails as relatives arrive from far and near; men and women gather in distinct clusters to exchange gossip and reaffirm old ties. Some men seize the opportunity to play cards and indulge in a little illicit drinking, others are drafted into helping with the laying out of chairs and the construction of the maduva, the shed under which the ritual will take place. For the most part the women retire to their kitchen bastion to prepare the night's

food and enjoy a rare chance for gossip and banter with a wider circle of female kin.

The performers have been arriving at the ritual house (tovil gedara) from early morning and are already well on in their task of transforming the domestic house compound (midula) into a splendid ritual arena (ranga mandalaya). With methodical fervour, heaps of banana stems, palm fronds, sticks, flowers and the like are fashioned into offering trays, decorations and images (see plate VI). The dextrous cutting and folding of leaves and strips draws an audience of children from all over the neighbourhood who watch in fascination the construction of ritual paraphernalia. Other performers are busy painting the clay images which will stand on either side of the central mal baliya. Discussions occasionally arise between performers in the process of construction, as some detail or other is questioned for its correctness, such as a proportion, motif or colour. Such questions are resolved by reference to the appropriate verse in which the prescriptions are laid down. Personal style must always operate within the formulaic precision which makes any individual image the 'same' as all other realisations of that image.

The end product must be pleasing to the eye (lasana rūpayak) as well as incorporating all the distinctive details of the deity such as colour, vehicle, weapons, and general appearance.





Plate VI. Babōris and Leeson construct offering trays and decorations.



The shed (maḍuva) is built in front of the house and underneath it will stand the seven images and the sixteen foot square arena in which the dancing will take place. The performers take care to flatten this area and remove any sharp stones which might damage their feet as they dance and stamp throughout the night. The area is sprinkled with cowdung (goma) and sandalwood (sandun) to purify the ground.

Babōris summons a group of men to embark on the decoration of the maḍuva. The vertical posts which support the roof of the maḍuva are to be adorned with ripe fruits; oranges, berries, areca nuts, mangoes and many more are tied to the posts and cascade in abundance on all sides. Two men tie a bunch of green bananas to a post which immediately draws a scolding from Babōris: the bananas must be ripe and the green comb is taken down and removed. Somebody points out that bananas are important and need to be included, another points out that no ripe ones can be had from anywhere, a resourceful onlooker suggests that one of the bananas be painted yellow. This suggestion is taken up and a green comb of bananas with one fake yellow one at its centre is displayed on the pole. Finally, the perimeter of the arena is marked out by a series of arches (torana) made from lengths of sugar cane (uk-gas).

With the completion of the clay images comes the difficult task of moving them from the horizontal position



of their construction to the vertical position of their deployment. The smaller images can be put into position relatively easily but the large ones require several strong men to move them. Under the watchful eye of its creator each image is gently heaved and shuffled into place, and bound to the bamboo frame with ropes. Great care is taken with the images to ensure that the soft clay is not dented, cracked or caused to fall off the frame. Scanning from right to left the seven assembled images are as follows:

- |                            |              |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1) Dasā Bandi              | (Plate VII)  |
| 2) Viskam Baliya           | (Plate VII)  |
| 3) Suriyavamsa Baliya      | (Plate VII)  |
| 4) Asu-ek Gāba Mal Baliya  | (Plate VIII) |
| 5) Chandra Baliya          | (Plate IX)   |
| 6) Dasā Krōda Rākṣa Baliya | (Plate IX)   |
| 7) Ē Rāṣṭaka Baliya        | (Plate IX)   |

[Accounts of the purpose, meaning and appearance of each of the seven images are given in Appendix IV at the end of this thesis.]

When Piyasena eventually takes up his position in the arena he will be sitting directly opposite the line of images, separated from them by the dancing floor. He will be positioned directly facing the central mal baliya so that his gaze falls on its centre.

Even though the images are now in position they remain incomplete in two essential aspects: their eyes remain





Plate VII. Bali images: (from left to right) Dasā Bandi, Viskam Baliya and Suriyavamsa Baliya.



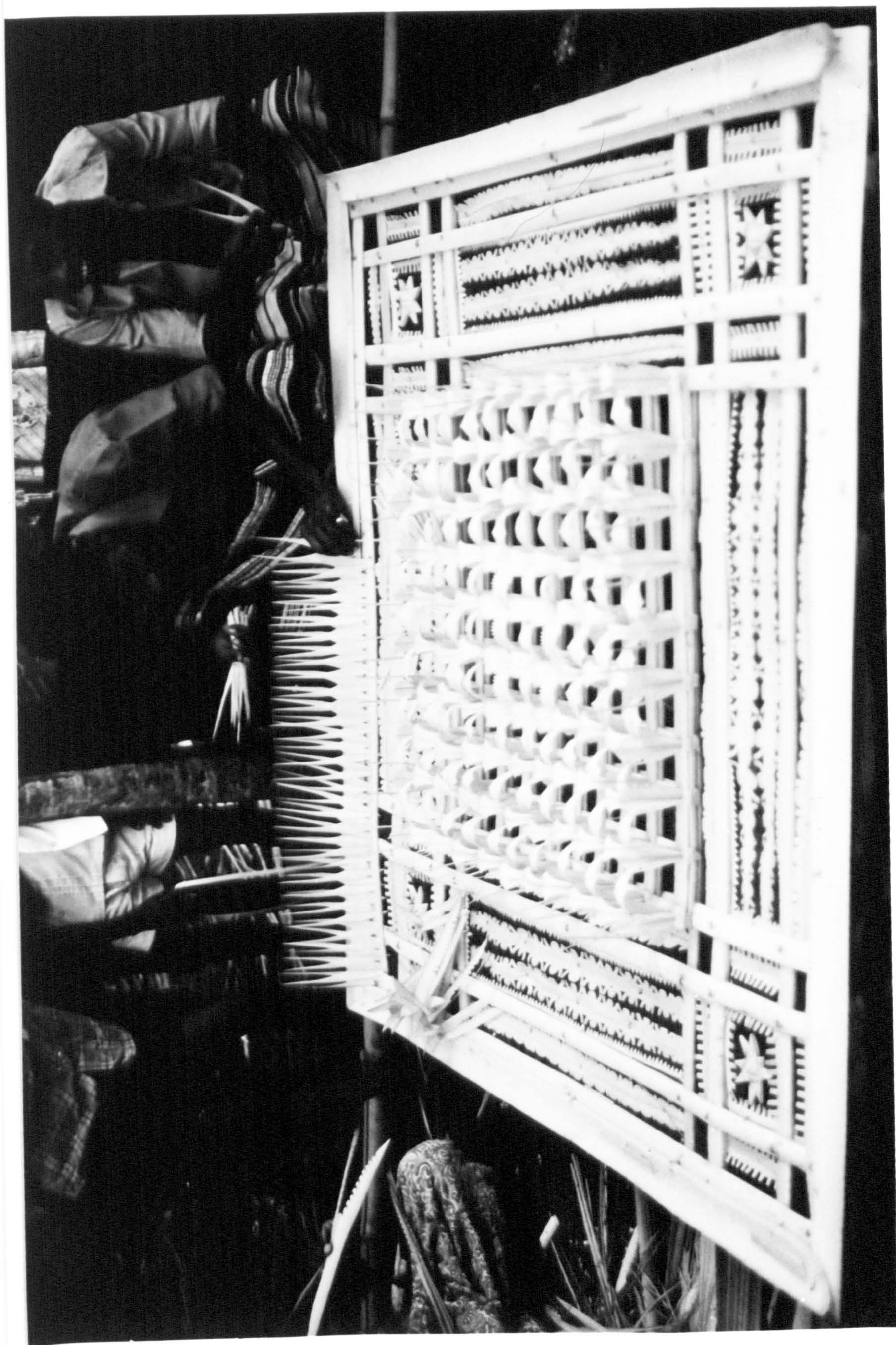


Plate VIII. The Asu-ek Gāba Mal Baliya shortly before its completion.



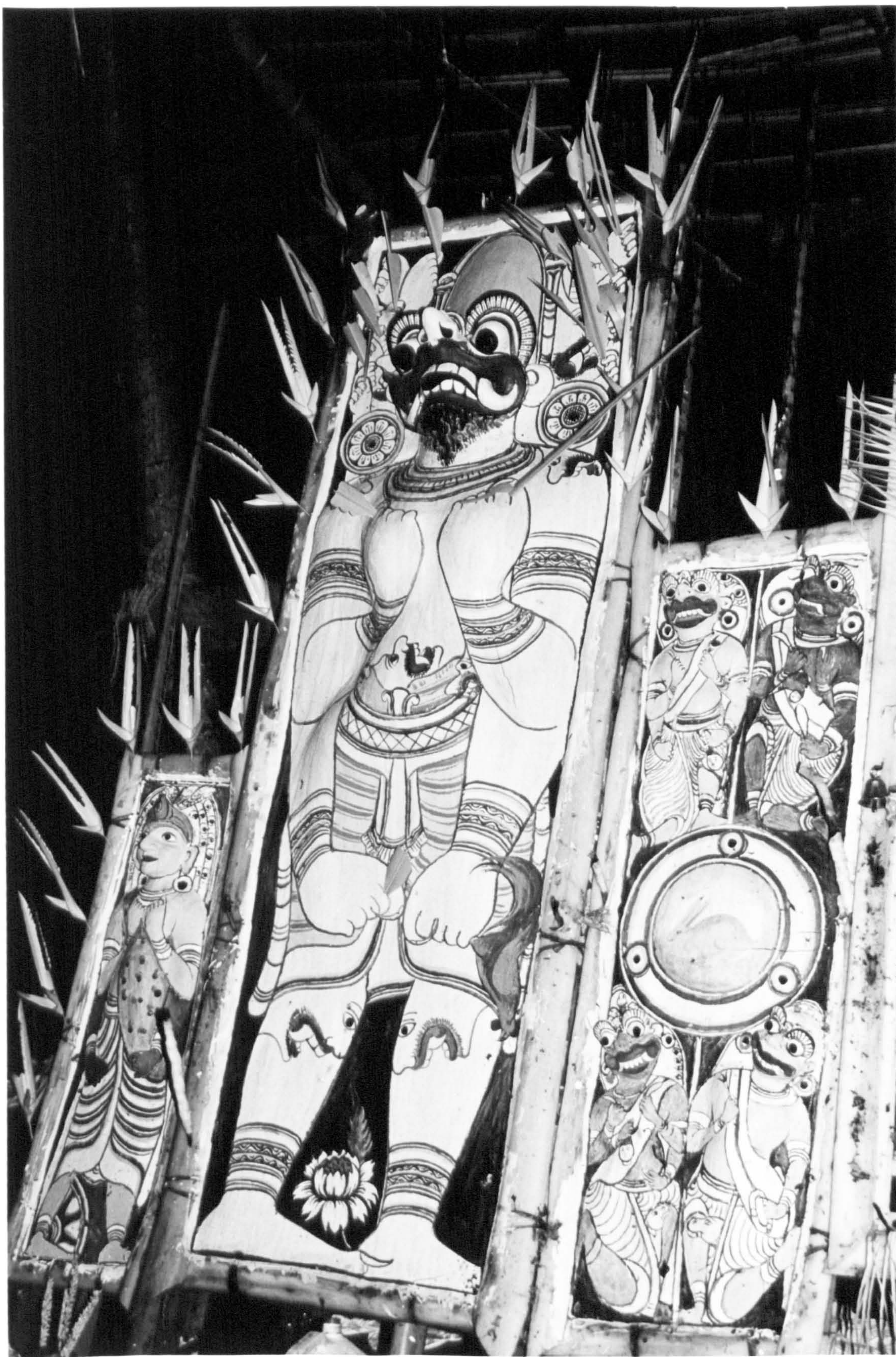


Plate IX. Bali images: (from left to right) Chandra Baliya, Dasā Krōda Rākṣa Baliya and Ē Rāṣṭaka Baliya.



blank, white spaces and their hands are empty; they have neither the power of their gaze nor the power of their weapons, they are still simply fashioned lumps of clay.

Shortly before the ceremony is to commence, Babōris performs the dangerous task of putting in the eyes of the images. This is carried out in a small ceremony akin to the Nētra Pinkama or Nētra Mangalays, in which each image is consecrated by having its eyes painted in. [3]

Babōris takes a pot of lamp-black and oil (andun) from a special offering tray (mal bulat tatṭuva) [4] and proceeds to intone mantra into the mixture. Holding the pot close to his mouth he recites the magical formulae into the pot breathing the power of the sounds into the mixture. After three or four minutes of such recitation the mixture is ready for use; it has been brought to life (jivan karala). Babōris now dips the tip of his ring finger into the mixture and with the circle of paint thereon dots in the eyes of each image. [5]

Babōris concentrates intensely as he carefully dots in each eye, for unlike the ordinary Nētra Pinkama in which the artist paints in the eyes of the image over his shoulder using a mirror, in this ceremony the artist directly faces the images. That Babōris can confront the gaze (bālma) of each image directly suggests that their power is considerably less than images of Buddha and the gods which cannot be faced directly, but nevertheless he maintains a solemn attitude and mutters protective mantra



throughout his task. Mistakes made at this point could result in sickness and misfortune falling upon the offending ādura.

The time for the ritual to commence is rapidly approaching and the performers hurriedly make final adjustments and additions to the ritual arena. In front of each image, and on either side of the bed upon which Piyasena will lie are placed clay pots containing coconut flowers (pun or purna kalasa). Each of these nine highly auspicious symbols, 'vase d'abondance' as Liyanaratna (1976) calls them, will eventually be dedicated to each of the nine planets.

In front of the bed on the floor are placed the eight objects associated with the aṭa magala, an eight sided diagram of great auspicious power. The objects are as follows: a reid bag (malu piṭa), crinum leaves (tolabō), pieces of the hirāssa vine, a rice pounder with an iron ferrule (pili mol), a mirror (kāḍapatayak), raw (i.e. unhusked) rice (kākulu sahal), a leopard's skull (divihisa) and a false hair piece (savariyak). [6] Unlike in the mal bulat tattuva, the hair piece and mirror used here are the real items.

The aṭa magala pīḍēniya, a special eight-sided offering tray is checked to see if its sixteen auspicious items (solos mangalaya) are in place; these include various leaves, seeds and flowers. Other final checks are

made to ensure that items required later in the ritual are ready and in a convenient place so as not to disrupt the flow of the ritual.

### Phase I

By about six thirty the heat of the day is displaced by a cool breeze. The intense activity which has filled the arena ceases and is given over to stillness and a rising sense of expectation. The sun's glow rapidly fades and with nightfall the whole appearance of the ritual arena changes. Pressure lamps are lit and placed around the maduva, illuminating in yellow and white light the ritual arena. The images which will confront the patient take on a new reality as the background of variegated greens changes to one of opaque blackness, rendering contrasts stark and details clear.

The crowds gather and press up against the perimeter of the arena on all sides. From the protection of the house and verandah watch the women and children. On the opposite side the arena is fringed with men and boys; faces recede into the blackness on all sides.

Inside the house Piyasena is made ready for his entrance. He is dressed in a clean white sarong and shirt. He has bathed and shaved; his hair is neatly oiled and parted. Babōris places in front of him a traditional brass oil lamp (pol tel pāna) and instructs him to light each of the wicks lying on the five points of the

starred upper tier. A cloth is placed over his head and he is led out of the main entrance of his house holding the burning lamp aloft. Babōris forces a passage through the assembled crowd and directs Piyasena to the bed.

Whilst Piyasena makes himself comfortable on the bed, Cyril (E16) positions two young girls on either side of Piyasena and instructs them to hold up a white curtain (kadaturāva), stretched across Piyasena's line of vision thus obscuring his view of the arena. The girls, who are Piyasena's nieces, are dressed in white dresses; ideally they should be virgins and should not be menstruating when they carry out this task.

Taking up a position in the centre of the arena, Babōris announces to the assembled crowd that they will take the Five Precepts (pan sil). An argument breaks out somewhere at the back of the crowd distracting the attention of the assembled crowd. One of Piyasena's relations has arrived at the event drunk and after a brief altercation with a member of the audience is refused permission to take the Five Precepts and attend the ritual. He staggers away muttering objections and obscenities. Attention once again focuses on Babōris and all kneel with hands reverently together to take the Precepts.

Following the precepts Babōris takes a seat at the side of the arena and the floor is taken by Cyril (E16) and Pedris (D3) who perform the Magul Bera. Their lower



bodies are covered by white cloths and their long heavy drums (yak bera)' are slung around their waists. They stand facing the patient and bow with hands together to greet him. In complete unison they break into a series of thunderous rolls and rhythmical phrases, stepping backwards and forwards as they play. They sing of the origin of the drum and how it was played by Gandhārva Divya Putra, the celestial musician, on the occasion of Buddha attaining enlightenment. The verses they sing are punctuated with a series of 'fancy licks' in which they strike their drums with rhythmical but highly unorthodox blows. With the completion of the Magul Bera, the drummers once again bow with hands together. In customary fashion Piyasena gives them a small offering of a few coins wrapped in betel leaves. The gift is pressed into the outstretched palms of the drummers, who, with heads still bowed, accept it with both hands. Cyril and Pedris now take up the position they will occupy throughout the rest of the night, that is, seated on a mat to Piyasena's right (Plate X).

Babōris once again turns to the centre of the arena dressed in a white cloth around his lower body and a white cloth loosely bound around his head. He indicates to the ritual assistant (madupurayā or madupurakārayā) [7] who comes forward holding a bowl of red hot charcoals (kabala) and an improvised bowl made from palmyrah leaf containing powdered tree resin (dummala). Babōris takes





Plate X. Drummers following closely the movements of the dancers during a Bali Tovil  
(from left to right; Dingōris, Cyril and Pedris).



a pinch of the powder between fingers and thumb and holding it to his lips breathes mantra onto it (dummala mātirīma). The madupurayā proffers the glowing charcoals and Babōris casts the powder onto them. The instant the powder lands on the brazier it is transformed into clouds of pungent white smoke which the madupurayā frantically wafts onto each of the assembled images in turn. The process is repeated until all objects in the arena have been enveloped in the charmed smoke. A whispered instruction sends the madupurayā to the side of the arena to pick up a bundle of torches (pandam) which he lights one at a time and passes to Babōris. Moving from right to left Babōris presses each torch into the soft banana bark frames of each of the images, thus illuminating still further the assembly of deities and demons.

The madupurayā now fetches a large clay pot filled with tumeric water (kahadiya). Babōris takes it and once again intones mantra, directing the sounds softly onto the surface of the liquid. Striding around the arena he deftly flicks the turmeric water onto the images, the ground and the area in Piyasena's vicinity using a sprig of areca nut flower. His every action is executed with grace and precision, and his authority compels attention from the audience.

Throughout the initial proceedings, Piyasena remains nervously seated behind the kadaturāva, perspiring



profusely from the closeness of the evening and the obvious strain of being the centre of attention.

Babōris once again returns to the floor, dressed as before, but holding a small brass hand-bell (gejja or gantāra) in his right hand. He commences singing, unaccompanied, a series of praises to the Triple Gem, his powerful voice sailing out clearly above the murmuring audience. At the end of each stanza he briskly rings the bell, a signal to the girls on either side of Piyasena to cry "āyu bō!", "long life!" [to Piyasena]. As they shout their good wishes they simultaneously cast a few beads of areca nut into clay pots of turmeric water situated at their feet. Initially the girls are scolded by one of the onlookers for not shouting loudly enough; how was their uncle to recover if they did not put any effort into it! The periodic shouts are resumed at higher volume to be kept up throughout the entire night with the girls making over three hundred such wishes before the morning.

Babōris, slowly circumambulating the arena, embarks on a lengthy series of recitations, part in Sanskrit couplets (ślōka) part in Sinhalese verse. The recitations are difficult to follow and the audience are, for the most part, only mildly attentive, content to let Babōris spout his esoteric rhymes (Plate XI).

The recitations draw attention to many of the items which will be used throughout the ritual. The origin of





Plate XI. Recitations being delivered by Babōris to the patient in the first phase of the Bali Tovil.



the thread (kanyā hūya) and the lime (dehi) are given and during this recitation Babōris unravels the ball of thread attached to the image of Dasā Bandī, and, moving from right to left, takes it across the top of each image, before bringing it over the arena and down into Piyasena's hand. On the end of the thread is a lime, a ring (mudda) and an hibiscus flower (ratu mal); these will remain in Piyasena's hand for the rest of the ritual. As the lime is placed into Piyasena's hand, he is requested to pierce the skin with his nail, thus releasing a puff of citronella; like the citronella, it is stated, will his afflictions also vanish.

Verses are given describing the curtain which hangs before him and upon their completion the girls are told to lower the kaḍaturāva. Simultaneously, the maḍupurayā raises a coloured cloth (panca pāṭa redi) which up until this point has hung over the central mal baliya. This act, known as 'opening the baliya' (bali ārīma), enables Piyasena to gaze for the first time on the splendid floral edifice into which his offerings will eventually be placed.

Nine clay oil lamps are now placed before Piyasena and Babōris embarks on rounds of verses dedicated to each of the nine planets. With their completion Piyasena is requested to fill each of the nine lamps with a medicinal compound made from five oils (pas tel), and to light each of them with his own hand. He is instructed to



worship each of the lamps three times (tun sāriya vandinna), after which they are carried by Babōris to the positions they will occupy throughout the rest of the night, that is, atop the nine vases (pun kalasa) located around the arena.

All the actions performed by Piyasena are accompanied by short phrases of drumming which highlight the points at which he physically participates in the ritual.

The first phase is brought to a close with a general request to the gods that the ritual be efficacious (bali kannalavva). The sequence ends in a hail of cries from performers and audience for good fortune and longevity for the patient - "āyu bō vē! āvaḍā āvaḍā!". The time is approximately 9.00 p.m.

For just over one hour the ritual thread of continuity is broken while the evening meal is taken. Piyasena steps outside the ritual arena, switching his role from that of patient to that of host in order to supervise rather more mundane happenings centering on the kitchen and dining tables.

With the focus temporarily shifted from the central arena, Babōris, Leeson (E11), Waḍu Mutta (D23), Alson (E1) and Odiris (E2) embark on the task of dressing themselves for the next phase of the ritual. The first item to be worn is the hēlaya, a white rectangle up to six yards in length. Working individually and in pairs, the dancers

carefully drape the hēlaya around their lower bodies such that their folds span out symmetrically from the stomach area. Over the top of the hēlaya is worn a bright red band (paṭiya) which is also several yards in length. The paṭiya are opened out to their full extent and with one dancer gripping an end tightly and pulling with all his might, another dancer slowly winds himself into the cloth, packing in the hēlaya and his own insides with each revolution. With the final revolution the paṭiya is carefully tucked in upon itself forming a broad red band which not only keeps the hēlaya firmly in place but also protects the dancers from internal damage which may result from some of their more vigorous dancing and spinning.

In a similar fashion each dancer winds himself into the turban-like head-dresses, arranging them carefully and securely in the time honoured way. They each hang around their necks home-made necklaces (mālāva or tālīvāla) made from sequins, beads and bits of cloth. Around their upper arms and wrists are worn various bracelets and bands, some of which are loose and rattle with movements of the arm (gigirī valalu). Their legs are covered with black leggings bordered with red, white and black frills (rāli pāda). Onto their shins they tie leather pads covered with small spherical bells (gigirī) and around their ankles they wear jingling bracelets (silambu or halamba). These latter items of the dancers' dress

render them comical cacophonies of jingling and clanking when walking, but during the dances they provide striking aural decoration.

The dancers take great pains in preparing themselves, ensuring that every detail of their own and each other's dress is correct, for when they eventually take to the arena they must cut a proud and impressive figure, and there must be no room for criticism or shortcomings.

By 10.10 p.m. all have been fed who needed to have been and the once clean and carefully laid dining table is strewn with dirty plates and spilt food. The dancers are fully dressed and waiting with some impatience in the centre of the arena for the proceedings to restart. Piyasena, is retrieved from the melee and seated in position on the bed once again. The troupe mill around the arena waiting for the appropriate moment to start; the dancers in particular are aloof and strangely distant (Plate XII).

When the audience has settled, disputes over the ownership of seats have been solved and every conceivable vantage point filled, then silence prevails and Odiris makes an impromptu speech. He requests permission from the relatives of Piyasena, who throughout is referred to impersonally as 'the patient' (Āturaya), that they may proceed with the ritual. He says they will perform with



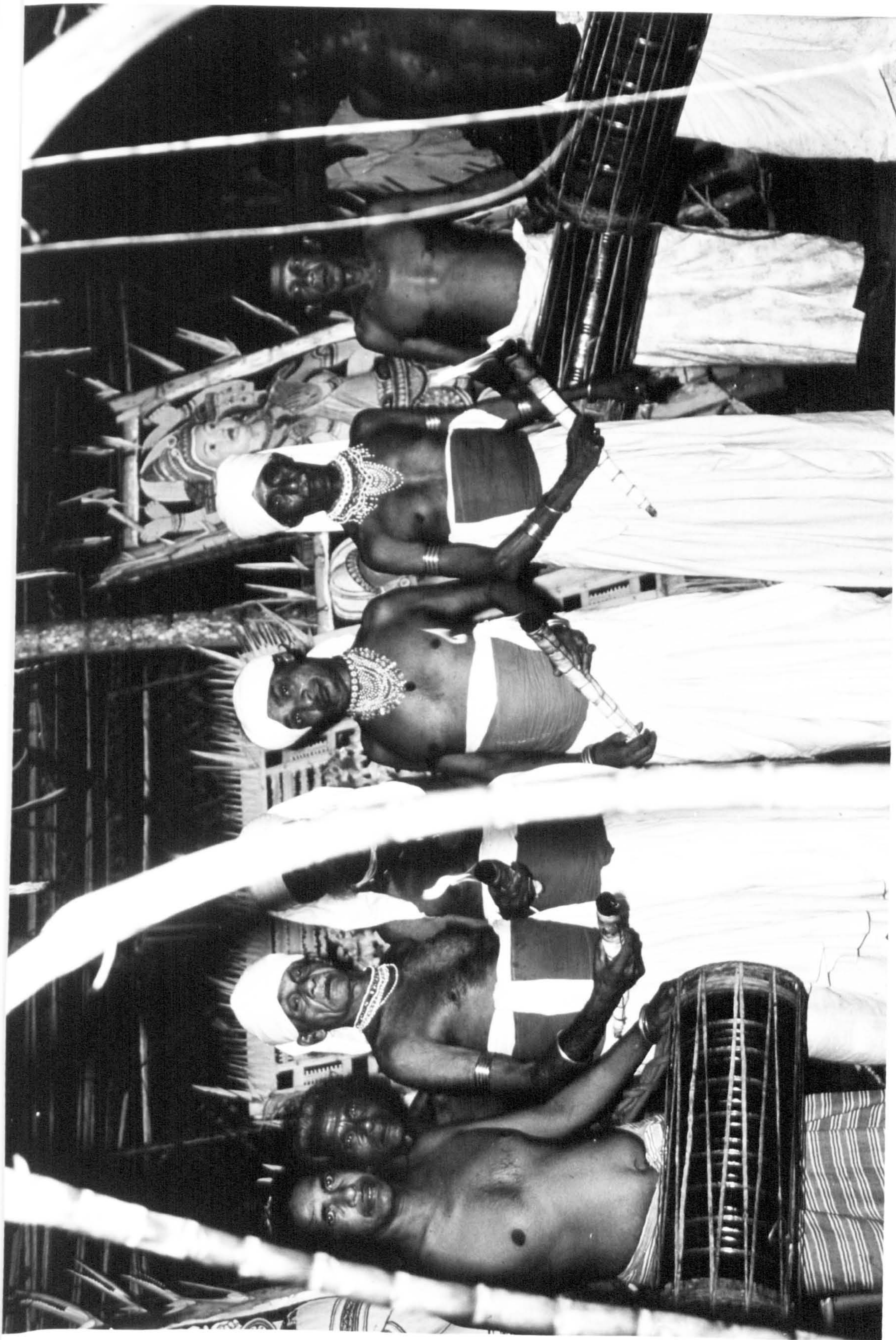


Plate XII. Dancers assemble to commence the second phase of the Bali Tovil  
 (from left to right: Cyril, Madupurayā, Waḍu Mutta, Alson, Odiris,  
 Babōris, Dingōris and Pedris).



good intentions and to the best of their ability. He comments on the quality of the preparations made for the ritual by the family and the excellent treatment received by the performers. He goes on to say that when drugs and medicine fail to produce relief, something has to be done for the spirit (ātmaya), and, as many of the recitations to be given relate to Lord Buddha, then the very hearing of them will bring relief. A spokesman for Piyasena now stands up and grants permission for them to continue and comments on Odiris' speech. He draws attention to my own presence saying that my being there had made the patient happy thus adding to the good effects of the ritual. With the conclusion of this speech the dancers bow with hands together to Piyasena, who responds likewise. The dancers quickly go around all the assembled audience offering their greetings.

## Phase II

The dancers now assemble in a circle in the middle of the arena. a torch is raised, the drummers respond by breaking into a slow and forceful rhythm. Suddenly all is sound and movement as the dancers move around in a circle, each carrying out identical steps and movements. Twisting, stamping, twirling and bending, they progress around the arena, first clock-wise, then anti-clockwise. The ring breaks and one dancer turns to face the others to present an elaborate sequence of steps in total synchrony

with the drum. Again the circle forms and around they move. Another dancer breaks the circle to execute his virtuoso steps, and then another, and another, until each has made his contribution. The audience observes the spectacle in captivated silence, as the drumming and its spatial counterpart, the dance, build up to peak after peak, only to subside each time into gentler rhythms and movements.

Recitation commences as they dance. A poem is sung describing the celestial abodes of the planets and inviting them to cast their gaze (disti) onto the proceedings taking place. Invitation is given to Viṣṇu Kataragama, Saman and a host of lesser gods of the earth, the stars and all the dēva worlds.

The dancing continues with rising intensity. As each dancer displays his talents to the full, the competitive aspect of the dance becomes increasingly apparent. The floor becomes dominated by the oldest member of the group, Waḍu Mutta, who despite his advancing years maintains the poise, dignity and control which transforms mere bodily movements into the most stunning of dances (Plates XIII and XIV).

The accumulated tension is now defused, the songs and dances are brought to an end as Odiris and Alson perform a light-hearted episode in which they juggle with burning torches whilst dancing at the same time. The lead up to this impressive sight is interspersed with clowning and





Plate XIII. Wadu Mutta takes the floor.





Plate XIV. Alson and Wadu Mutta dance before the Mal Baliya.



comic repartee between the dancers and the drummers involved. At around 11.20 p.m. the sequence ends with the weapons (āyudha) of each of the deities represented being fitted into place. Swords, spears, rosaries and the like, all fashioned from gok-kola, are pressed into the soft, clay hands of the images, thus bringing them to their final state of activation.

As suddenly as the dancing and drumming began, it ceases, only to be replaced by the rising murmur of the crowd. The dancers relax, loosening their costumes and wiping the shining sweat from their bodies. There is a brief recess whilst tea is served and refreshments taken.

At around midnight the proceedings recommence with the dedication or surrendering (pāvadīma) of the bali images. For almost nine hours the patient is subject to rounds of recitation and dance, as he and the audience are taken on a conducted tour of the imagery displayed before them. Step by step they are told what the performance is about through poems of origin, descriptions and verses of dedication; attention is progressively focussed and shifted in a seven-fold movement across the images. Throughout the night a bewildering catalogue of illnesses, disorders and conditions which may be impeding the patient's good fortune are accumulated and requests made for relief from each. The patient hears songs which tell of the virtues of Buddha and is reminded of the many stories in which these virtues are popularly illustrated.



On a number of occasions in the small hours of the morning Piyasena succumbs to sleep, his head nods and his eyes close, only to be re-awakened by the cries of "āyu bō!" from the girls and requests from the performers to carry out certain actions. Not awake, yet not asleep; the arena and the dancers take on a dream-like quality for those who struggle to maintain concentration.

In view of the length of the ritual and the considerable number of verses recited in its course it has been necessary to select and condense sequences from the second phase. The overall structure of this phase is repetitive and cumulative, the same things being said and done over and over again with slight variations each time. It is therefore possible to provide an illustration of one particular dedication which typifies the general tenor of the ritual without losing any of the overall feel for the impact of the second phase.

The dedication to be described is that of Dasā Bandi which lasts just over an hour and is the first to be performed. At various points examples of songs and verses have been included as well as particular lines or phrases which recur throughout the ritual. Unfortunately, tapes made during the performance were not of sufficient quality to produce a complete and adequate transcription to be included in the thesis. Recordings made in the midst of a crowd, of recitations performed to the accompaniment of a drum, whilst performers dance around a sizeable arena,

leave a lot to be desired!

The dedication to Dasā Bandi is led by Waḍu Mutta, the most senior performer, and accompanied by Babōris and Odiris, who follow his recitations. The dedication of each image is the responsibility of a particular ādura who is supported by one or two of the other performers. Throughout the night different combinations of duos and trios come together for each dedication. The drummers, however, are not afforded the luxury of periodic rests and beat tirelessly for almost the entire night.

Waḍu Mutta and Babōris take the floor and, walking slowly around the arena, commence the recitations with brief praises to the Triple Gem. Still walking around the arena they begin reciting Sanskrit ślōka, offering praises to Indra and Sarvarāja and other unfamiliar deities, inviting them to leave their abodes and come to the place of the ritual. Babōris sings two lines and Waḍu Mutta responds with two of his own. After every four lines the hand bell is rung signalling the girls to make their appropriate cries. The audience make little response to the unfamiliar consonant clusters and aspirated sounds of the Sanskrit verses; for the most part they are distracted and their hubbub threatens to drown the recitations. The drummers, seated on a mat to the right of the arena, take the opportunity to tune their drums.

Without sign or signal the recitations now turn to a description of different types of Bali and the

preparations necessary. The verses are now more familiar Sinhala quatrains, still unaccompanied but heavily intonated, giving them the appearance of an unfamiliar language. Odiris joins Babōris and, in response to Waḍu Mutta singing the first two lines of each quatrain, they, together in chorus, sing the third and fourth. As the verses unfold, giving descriptions of the hand-held clay offering (at baliya) and the items required for this offering, the drummers quietly introduce a slow and persistent rhythm. The dancers respond with a slow, ambulant dance with which they continue to move around the arena. They describe the shed (maduḷva) in which the ritual is taking place, its construction and preparation, drawing attention with their burning torches to each feature as it arises in the verses. They tell how they have prepared themselves in the time honoured way: cleaning their teeth, bathing, applying sandalwood to their bodies, dressing in clean white clothes, combing their hair and binding it with a clean white cloth. Throughout the recitations the drumming becomes louder and more powerful, periodically 'changing gear' as word and sound integrate more closely. The pace of the dancers too quickens as the three of them twirl and strut around the arena. The story of Visāla Mahā Nuvara is sung, how it was afflicted by demons and how Buddha drove them away. The dancing is fast and furious now and with the conclusion of each sequence of verses, the dancers perform



a series of virtuoso steps before the patient amidst the ringing of the bell and cries of long life for the patient. The sequence is brought to a close with a brief poem of blessing delivered by Waḍu Mutta on his own. The poem requests that as the ills were driven from Visāla so may they leave the patient. After a flourish of drumming and dancing the pace slows down ~~for the~~ description of Dasā Bandi. Waḍu Mutta takes up a position to the right of the image whilst, to the gentle rhythm of the drums, Babōris and Odiris slowly dance around the arena. Using his burning torch Waḍu Mutta draws attention to the distinctive features of the image as they arise in the verses; the patient is caused to see the image (dakvanavā, the causative of dakinavā, to see). The colour, weapons, vehicle and appearance of the deity are all described in verses known as 'bali descriptions' (bali vistara kavi) or 'moulding verses' (ḥmbun kavi).

With the completion of the descriptions of the deity, requests are made for the protection and relief of the patient by the power of the baliya. Such requests are repeated often at the end of verses throughout the ritual, for example:

a) noyek dosa mē baliyen yayi ada.

May various evils go today by [the power  
of] this baliya.

b) set salasā mē ātura dina dina rakina.

Bring tranquillity and protect this

patient from day to day.

The pace of the recitations once again increases as requests are made for relief from the diseases to which the patient is prone during the Great Period of the Sun, such as eczema, fever, itching, headaches, swellings, lameness and stomach pains. It is requested that the patient live in a state of health and wealth for a period of not less than one hundred and twenty years, the period of maximum longevity for a human (the sum of all the individual planetary periods). The patient is assured that by the very hearing of the verses benefits will be received.

kiyana kavi asā seta salasan nolesā

irugē mahā dasāven vana dosa vanasā

Hearing the spoken verses brings tranquillity

the dos which comes from the Great Period

of the Sun is destroyed.

Vomiting, stomach disorders, insanity, untimely death (akala maranaya), wind originated diseases of skin and bone will all be avoided. Once again the verses end in a flourish of sound and movement as blessings are shouted over Piyasena's head:

āyu rakṣā vanta - protect life

āvaḍā, āvaḍā - life be long.

life be long

āyu bō vē

- may age increase

Babōris now steps forward to deliver a solo recitation known as a kaṭapāṇḍiya, literally 'clearing the mouth'. This spoken recitation, somewhat akin to a mantra, is delivered in Sinhala and requests the deity, addressed respectfully as the 'most gracious godly ruler of the great period' (mahā dasā adipati divya rājayan vahāṇse), to grant relief to the patient. The recitation details minutely the various parts of the body which may be afflicted, ranging from the roots of the hair (kes mula) to the marrow in the bones (āṭa midula). Lists are also recited of the many diseases and disorders which may afflict the various parts of the body. The recitation ends with a request for relief from the 98 diseases (aṭa anuvak rōga), the 99 disturbances (nava anuvak viṣādi) and the 203 dangers (dēsiya tunak antrā). Although it was never made clear what these numerous afflictions actually were, the reference en masse to disorders is a device used on a number of occasions throughout the ritual.

As Babōris' recitation draws to a close he is joined by Wadu Mutta and Odiris once again, and together they embark on a lengthy set kavi of over 23 verses. The poem tells of the places where Buddha spent the rainy season retreat (vas) in each of the twenty years after he gained enlightenment. Each verse ends with a request



that by listening to and thinking of the events brought to mind (matak karala) the patient may receive peace and tranquility:

Dana savne Buduvi pan tis vasini  
Isipatanē palamuva vesa vesumuni  
ema sandinē mē obata set sirisāḍini  
lova nitine yasa me raḍina dina yeheni.

Buddha reached enlightenment at thirty-  
five years old  
He spent his first vas period at Isipatana  
From that event may you receive blessings  
Always in the world may you have a good  
and prosperous existence.

In a similar vein the events of the following nineteen years are referred to. The recitations begin slowly and and gather pace as the lines are sung in more familiar rhythms and the alternations between performers become more rapid. The recitation concludes with three verses which list actions and events which might have resulted in the patient accumulating dos:

evan mē aturata kovil tḥnumade  
nila hō hāma tḥna geyi hatu pipunada  
anavina ḥsvaha dividos hadunada  
dakvan me baliya mē hāma dosada

a temple is constructed to the patient  
or mushrooms sprout everywhere in the  
house or home,  
or sorcery, evil eye and purgery sickness  
arise.  
show this baliya every dos.

The final verses in the dedication of the Dasā Bandi Baliya are 'head to foot poems' (sirasapāda). In these verses, blessings are bestowed on different parts of the patient's body descending from head to foot. The dos is driven down in the face of the power which arises from

reference to stories from Buddha's previous lives:

Vaḍḍinna mahalu vesagena muni Sakvalagala  
yakun vesana  
vāsana pīsaṣa pāvāsu ekala mahalla yava  
nosita metana  
etana inna bāruva yakuta budurās vihiduna  
savana  
savana mukhaya belle nosita dosa bāsa yanu  
e anuhasina.

Going in the guise of an old man, Buddha,  
visited the demon's home, Sakvalagala.  
The demons told him he could not stay there  
and was to leave.  
But it was the demons who could not remain  
because Buddha began emanating his six  
divine rays (budurās).  
From ears, mouth and neck, may the dos  
without resistance go down.

Each of the stories related makes reference to a particular part of the body and it is from these areas of the body that dos is expelled. For example, in the verse given above, the rays emanate from Buddha's head and it is from the head that the dos is expelled. In another example the story is told of how Buddha, whilst travelling with his mother, was ship-wrecked and how Buddha swam for seven days with his mother on his shoulders before they reached land. From this story it is requested the dos be driven from the shoulders, elbows and fingers. The verses move down the patient's body with the ādura drawing attention to particular areas.

The verses sung in the sirasapāda are delivered rapidly and with considerable vitality. The rolling feeling that the poem has is derived not only from the powerful drumming and pace of the recitation but also from the way in which the lines of verses follow on. In each

of the verses the end word of each line is either the same as, or very similar to, the beginning word of the next line. Thus, with the end of each line the beginning of the next is anticipated giving the poem a forceful drive highly appropriate to the idea of pushing down the dos (as well as providing the performers with a useful mnemonic!).

With the usual hail of dancing, ringing, shouting and drumming the dedication of Dasā Bandi is brought to a close. Waḍu Mutta and Babōris retire to the sidelines to rest whilst the floor is taken by Alson and Odiris who continue with the next dedication, that of the Viskam Baliya.

Throughout the night the recitations continue, scanning minutely the assembled imagery. The form remains the same but the varying combinations of performers provide diverse content as they draw more recitations from their extensive repertoires. Some recitations may only be known by one or two performers and are thus highly prized (vaṭinā ēva), for other more widely known recitations three or four dancers may join in. The overall impression is one of an interminable flow of words, wishes, sentiment and ideas.

The 'interminable flow' is stemmed briefly at 3.00 a.m. after the dedication of the Viskam Baliya, when all take an opportunity to relax during the mahā tē.



literally 'the big tea'. The mahā tē interlude figures in all major all-night performances and provides a refreshing respite from the pulse of the ritual. Plates of sweetmeats (kāvum, kokkis etc.), biscuits and bananas are served followed by tea, coffee, cigarettes, betel and other stimulants to keep every one going through the wearying hours of the early morning. The ritual recommences at 3.45 a.m. and continues until the dedication of the images is completed at 9.00 a.m.

Apart from requests to worship offerings of rice, flowers, coins (panduru) and pieces of sweetmeat (kāvum), which the dancers then convey to the receptacles of the mal baliya (gāba), Piyasena's physical participation in the ritual is minimal. For the most part he is serious and contemplative, gazing through the window which has been opened upon his fate.

At the end of the dedication of the final image, that of the Ē Rāṣṭaka Baliya, a special sirasapāda is performed in which the sentiments expressed in all the other sirasapāda are more forcefully illustrated.

At the beginning of the recitation Piyasena is given a white cloth (moṭṭakkiliya) which he places over his head. The girls on either side of him are each given 54 small cloth torches (vilakku) which they are instructed to light and cast into the pots of tumeric water at the end of each stanza when the hand-bell is rung. The

objects of the ata magala (see page 340 . ) are re-arranged such that Piyasena can place his feet on the rice pounder (mol gaha) and offerings of betel leaves and coins are placed upon its shaft.

The poem which Wadu Mutta recites has 54 stanzas and at the end of each, the girls cry "āyu bō" and each cast a burning torch into the turmeric water ( $2 \times 54 = 108$ , a number of great magical significance). Each concluding line of the stanzas makes reference to a part of the body and a request is made that the dos may be expelled therefrom. In the course of the recitation Piyasena is directed to move the cloth slowly down his body, from head to shoulders, from shoulders to chest, from chest to waist until it eventually reaches his toes where it remains until the verses are completed. He is now directed to dampen the corner of the cloth in turmeric water and clean the tips of each of his toes with it. Having completed this action he is told to throw the cloth at the mal baliya where it is rudely stuffed on top of the structure.

This episode is also known as the una vīdiya, the path of the fever, and is associated with the removal of heat from the body (hence the extinguishing of torches which in Piyasena's case was thought to be arising due to the unfavourable location of Saturn.)

With the casting of the cloth there is a long overdue

recess for breakfast. The performers wash, eat and relax, and gradually regain their orientation after the night's exertions.

### Phase III

At 10.30 a.m. efforts are made to restart the ritual, but this time it is the performers who are reluctant, desiring sleep rather than further exertions. Nevertheless, they assemble themselves for the final phase of the ritual, the separation of the patient from the powers which have been invoked. The Bali Samayama or Visāla Vīdiya, 'The Great Path', in contrast to the preceding fifteen or so hours contains little in the way of recitation and is almost entirely composed of dancing.

The episode commences with a lengthy series of elaborate dances for the entertainment of the audience. The dances are interspersed with short rhymes, full of praise and often witty, directed at key members of the audience with the aim of eliciting donations. People of local standing and position are picked and may have four or five sural performed to them before they check the performer's cheek and decide that conspicuous generosity is too high a price to pay for their status. The performers dance and sing to all members and quarters of the audience, wringing every possible cent out of them. The accent in this phase is on entertainment and enjoyment. For the first time in the ritual, powdered



tree-resin (dummala) used as a pyrotechnic device, rather than as incense. Cast onto burning torches it produces enormous sheaths of flame (kīla gahanavā) which periodically envelop the entire arena.

The sural are stretched out for almost two hours before being brought to a close. The way (vīdiya) is now open for Piyasena to rid himself once and for all of his various afflictions.

Firstly, he is asked to cast away his ills by moving his hands in a casting motion three times from his temples in the direction of each of the seven images. He is asked to cast turmeric water to the right, left and to the centre of each image using a sprig of areca-nut. He is now told to worship each of the seven images, and after this action Babōris and Alson take the weapons from each of the images.

Attention is focussed onto the central mal baliya as Piyasena is requested to cast the betel leaf and coin offerings, previously kept on the rice pounder, onto the mal baliya. The kadaturāva is now cast onto the mal baliya, followed by the lime and thread which Piyasena has held in his hand for most of the night. These once celebrated objects are now unceremoniously stuffed into the mal baliya, damaging the once pristine structure.

Babōris now takes a cock, which until this point has been waiting patiently with its legs tied together, and

stands holding it before Piyasena's eyes. Babōris intones mantra intended to cause any malevolence still afflicting Piyasena to be transferred to the cock. Piyasena, once again, moves his hands three-times in a glancing motion from his temples, only this time onto the cock. Babōris now takes the cock behind the bali images and bangs it against the framework on which the images stand, with considerable force, causing the startled bird to crow in pain. The final transferrance of dos has been effected.

Piyasena is now handed the traditional brass oil lamp which he carried into the arena almost eighteen hours earlier. Holding the lamp, with its five wicks burning, he walks, a little uncertainly, from the ritual arena and into this house. It is imperative that nobody crosses his path on the return journey, and to effect his untroubled transition, friends and relatives force a passage through the crowd.

All five Adurā now take the floor for the final dance. Amidst a flurry of wild and acrobatic dances, accompanied by thunderous drumming, great sheaths of flame are cast all about, engulfing each of the images in turn, effectively cauterising the defiled and polluted offerings. Following these dramatic scenes the mal baliya is pulled from its frame and carried to a bridge close by, where, with little ado, it is cast into the

stream below.

The clay images suffer an equally ignoble fate. Pulled from their frames they are carried to the bottom of the garden and propped against a tree where they are left to decay with the ravages of sun and rain.

Within a remarkably short space of time the house and compound revert to their normal state. Floors are swept and the mass of carefully fashioned decorations and offering trays are re-classified as rubbish, pulled to pieces and discarded in heaps. By mid-afternoon visitors have departed and there is little evidence that anything out of the ordinary took place at all.

Odiris sits with Piyasena on his verandah, quietly intoning a yantra which he ties to Piyasena's upper arm as a final protection during the fateful period. Having bathed and dressed, the performers bid their farewells amidst thanks and good wishes from Piyasena and his family.

In the weeks which followed his Bali Tovil, Piyasena claimed to have received great benefit (mahā gunayak lābunā) from its performance. Quantitatively, the ritual had changed nothing in his life, except perhaps to make him a little poorer, but qualitatively the ritual had made things different: he felt much better. As with many other performances of exorcism and healing, the conjunction of social and cosmic forces realised at



Piyasena's tovil had apparently succeeded in changing his perception of his circumstances.

#### Notes to Chapter 6

[1] The set kavi to which performers refer in this instance are not to be confused with those specially composed by poets - often Buddhist priests - in return for payment. These verses of auspicious construction are used in the supplication of gods and requests for their favours.

[2] This rather cynical view of ritual, embedded in the ideology which surrounds the transmission of knowledge and skills (cf. Chapter 3), is paralleled in ideas about Buddhist tradition in general. It is believed that from the time of the Buddha, His teachings have been subject to a progressive loss of power and meaning. The duration of this entropic process is 5000 years by which time Buddha's teaching, the Dhamma will be totally corrupted. At this point the cycle will commence once again with the coming of the next Buddha.

[3] For further details of this ceremony see Coomaraswamy (1908:70-75) and Gombrich (1966 and 1971:138-141).

[4] The mal bulat tattuva or flower and betel offering tray, is required at most rituals of exorcism and healing. It is usually kept on a chair (mal bulat putuva) and is a general symbol of welcome and hospitality to the hosts of unacknowledged deities and demons who might cast their gaze onto the ritual proceedings. It is likened unto the keeping of a chair and a chew of betel in the home for the arrival of an unannounced guest.

The offering tray consists of a flat tray onto which placed a variety of offerings, such as a cloth, a lamp, numerous cloth wicks, shredded flowers and betel leaves, turmeric water, rosewater, incense and a number of times included to please the female consorts of the demons (yakṣiniyō). These latter items include a wig, a comb, and mirror, each item being an exquisite replica of the real item fashioned in gok kola.

[5] The ring finger is called the golden finger (raṅgaṅgilla) or medicine finger (vēdāṅgilla) and is associated with life. It is from this finger that medicine should be taken, for example.

[6] The objects of the ata magala form part of a

symbolic complex of great antiquity. Barnett (1917:6) provides brief accounts of the myths of origin of each object and relates them to the occasion when Vijaya was exorcised of 'perjury sickness' (dividos). I have also heard these objects mentioned in connection with the first performance of exorcism for Queen Mānikpāla, during which they were collected by the gods to facilitate her cure. They are included in most exorcism and healing ceremonies to absorb and exorcise evil.

[7] The madupurayā is normally provided by the patient's family, although he need not be a kinsman. He fulfills a crucial role in the running of all tovil because it is his responsibility to assist the ādura in their actions: fetching coals, keeping torches burning and generally fetching and carrying at the behest of the performers. In ordinary exorcisms he is responsible for the preparation of food offerings for the demons from which he earns the affectionate title, 'the devil's cook' (yakṣa kōkiya)!

## CHAPTER 7

### PERFORMANCE AND PERSUASION

'The subject of religion falls under the head of rhetoric in that rhetoric is the art of persuasion and religious cosmologies are designed in the last analysis as exceptionally thoroughgoing models of persuasion.'

(Kenneth Burke 1961:v 'The Rhetoric of Persuasion')

#### 7.1 Introduction

'Curing ceremonies do not cure... and any attempt to pretend they do is wrong from the first.'

(Bloch 1977:77)

In the preceding chapters the contexts and underlying organisation of healing rituals performed by the Beravā has been progressively elaborated. This account culminated in the previous chapter in a detailed exposition of a single ritual event, the performance of a major Bali Tovil, one of the most elaborate displays of Beravā ritual knowledge and skill.

With the data presented we are now in a position to



understand the possible ways in which a ritual of this type can achieve its intended therapeutic effects. In order to do this, it is necessary to focus not so much on what is performed in the course of a Bali Tovil but on how it is performed. The power of a performance of the type described above lies in the very act of performance itself and is a success or failure to the extent that the performers create the desired interpretation for their actions and utterances. The performers of a healing ritual must persuade their participants of the emotional resonances of key symbols and metaphors; ritual performance thus invites but never commands the kinds of transformation which are explicit in its declared purpose.

[1] It is the doing of ritual itself which is central to the curative process and it is only through participation in the long and elaborate process of ritual organisation, construction and creation that there is a possibility that ritual action can come to have meaning and generate an inner understanding of personal misfortune and suffering. Ritual, like theatre, creates an illusion capable of expanding the understanding of the human condition.

Such a view of meaning and the creation of meaning takes us far away from the models of communication which have dominated the study of ritual in recent years (cf. Leach 1976 and Lewis 1981:35-38 for critique). To speak in this instance in terms of messages, codes and information which are presumed to be communicated in

ritual would obscure many of what I have described as the crucial aspects of ritual performance. One might even go so far as to argue that the ritual is successful to the extent that communication is wiped out to be replaced by experiential understanding (as in the case of the Sanskrit couplets described later in the Chapter).

It is thus hardly surprising that Bloch arrives at the conclusion which he does at the beginning of this Chapter: 'curing ceremonies do not cure...'. Starting from the notion that ritual communicates, he analyses the extreme formality and rigidity which characterise ritual expression and goes on to conclude that ritual communication is nothing more than a feature of traditional authority and a mask of particular power relations. Ritual, by its use of essentially non-discursive or presentational forms narrows the possibility for interpretation and consequently the possibility for alternative formulations of its truth value: 'you cannot argue with song' (Bloch 1977:71). The formalisation of ritual expression empties the 'communication' act of its discursive properties and propositional meaning, and what remains is the illocutionary or performative force of the act. Ritual thus becomes a source of mystification, 'an engine of power and coercion' (Tambiah 1981:152).

In the end, Bloch succeeds in throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The possibility of operational

efficacy (Moore and Myeroff 1977:12) is swept away along with all the subtleties of ritual symbolism, ritual patterning and the potency which ritual can generate in its performance. Ritual becomes a hand-maiden to political authority capable of only the narrowest of meaning and interpretation, rather than a complex edifice capable of generating new meanings and interpretations and producing positive experiential transformations on the part of its participants.

How then does a ritual like the Bali Tovil achieve its operational efficacy? How is the possibility of a meaningful transformation of some negative condition brought about for the participants in ritual? In providing possible answers to these questions I have selected three key elements of the overall ritual performance for analysis. These are as follows: an appeal to Tradition, reference to, and communion with, powers that existed in the past; an act of expression, the articulation of symbols and metaphors in an ordered and meaningful construction in space and time; and thirdly, an act of performance, the particular manner in which the appeal to Tradition and the act of expression is realised in any single instance.

## 7.2 An appeal to Tradition

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the Beravā supply Sinhalese society with an important body of ritual



specialists and virtuosos whose services are generally called upon to deal with situations in which a breakdown in the social and psychological order has occurred or is about to occur. Their appropriateness to fulfill this role derives internally from the transmission of specialist traditions of knowledge and skills which give them the wherewithal to deal with certain types of problems and furthermore provides them with an identity which can be upheld and manipulated in the process of transmitting traditions. Externally, however, the appropriateness of the Beravā in this sphere derives from the imposition of an identity from outside as a result of the logic of caste relations and the long historical association of the Beravā with the symbolic 'dirty work' of society: they are the ones who handle dos and are themselves perceived metaphorically as the dos in society. This negative identity imposed from without the caste is largely out of the control of its members. Irrespective of actual occupation or social position, the notion of 'Beravā-ness' is still a source of stigma and prejudice.

The traditions (paramparāva), transmitted within the caste, are perceived externally as a Tradition, a coherent body of knowledge, techniques and artefacts brought down from the past by the Beravā. It is the identification of the Beravā with this transmitted Tradition which renders them legitimate in translating certain signs into symptoms

which they then act upon on behalf of others. The Beravā are the vehicle which transmutes into the present, modes of action which were used in the past. They are a conduit through which the power of previously efficacious acts can flow into the present. It is this power which is energised in many of the healing rituals performed by members of the caste; the sense of communion and identity with ancient actions and powers provides a crucial paradigm for creating the potential for a meaningful transformation within their clients.

For example, in the case of the Bali Tovil, initially the Tradition of astrology is activated and engaged and an astrologer identifies the source of certain problems. Illness, misfortune and malaise are placed in a meaningful causal relationship with the commencement of 'the great period of the Sun' and the planetary movements therein. The victim will encounter a 'fruitless period', a period when none of his endeavours and aspirations will come to fruition; however much he sows he will not reap. As Perinbanayagam (1982:118) has suggested, the astrologer constructs a 'myth of the self', a statement or text which:

'...delineates an ideal-causal structure and a probable sequence to one's life, and its truth value is accepted in so far as it conforms to the religious and mythical world-views that are current in the society.'  
(ibid:151)

and the astrological consultation becomes:

'...a discursive ritual, in which particular selves and their worlds are recreated and confirmed.'

(ibid:172)

It is upon this discursive ritual and the 'myth of the self' which emerges, that the Beravā act. When the results of a consultation produce a 'myth of the self' which is unacceptable but nonetheless true, that is one which is congruent with both the horoscopic inferences of the astrologer and the experiences of the client, then other traditions must be invoked.

When the services of a Bali specialist are called upon he is able to employ knowledge and understanding to transform the discursive ritual of the astrologer into a presentational one in which the unacceptable aspects of a 'myth of the self' are filtered out. By employing presentational symbols and expressive modes which are highly stylised and formalised, the ritual seeks to demonstrate and display its own unarguable definitions of reality: you cannot argue with the planets! Discursive possibilities are closed as the patient is persuaded to participate in and experience the removal of all that is negative and inauspicious, with the concomitant amplification of all that is positive regarding his particular 'myth of the self'. The myth is represented to the victim in more positive terms, the signifiers remain the same but the victim can be made aware of a future in



which he can determine what certain events come to signify. Man need not drift hapless and helpless through periods when the planets do not afford their benevolent protection, but, through careful action and emulation of the Buddha, he can ameliorate, if not eradicate, possible misfortune.

The Beravā possess, and have received from their predecessors, the wherewithal to bring about such transformation. They claim such knowledge has come to them over the centuries from the sages of ancient India. They themselves assert that they are of the Brahmin caste (bamunu kūliya) and the dress they wear during the ritual is imitative of Brahmin attire. The ritual is considered by them to have originated in Northern India at the time of the Buddha and it is to that time and that place that their ritual recitations repeatedly refer. The events which occurred then, provide the key paradigms upon which the performance of the Bali Tovil rests in the present. Demons caused affliction to fall upon a particular mythical person; such as a king or prince. The aid of Buddha was enlisted and by the power of his supreme benevolence, he was able to overcome the demons. The greed, maliciousness, and unbridled passions which the demons represent were thus brought under the control of Buddha's benign influence. Out of this archetypal encounter, the ancient sages, with divine inspiration, were able to formulate a series of techniques which would

enable such afflictions as befell the king/prince/queen in the original story, to be removed thereafter: 'because then... therefore now'.

With each subsequent enactment, the bearers of the received wisdom strive to reduplicate, as accurately as possible, the patterns and procedures of the past. If they do not observe this discipline then their acts will have no power. The nava gāba mal baliya Leeson constructs today is identical to the one he constructed yesterday, and the day before. Each construction is built from the same symbolic blueprint (although the activity has long since become an automatic skill of the hands with the head interfering but little). The art of construction was taught to him by his father, who was in turn taught by his father, and so on. Similarly, the verses which Leeson recites to accompany the dedication of his mal baliya are the same from occasion to occasion; they are also the same as his father's and presumably the same as his grandfather's.

Each time a ritual is performed in this way, its performers effect a collapsing of time or what Eliade (1959) saw as the abolition of history, an attempt to return to the time of conception and creation, in illo tempore. Through an identification with all previous acts there is a communion with the source and its powers are made to flood into the present, cleansing, charging and regenerating. Leeson's nava gāba mal baliya is not

just an offering but the offering, recurring like a slowly diminishing echo across time.

During each performance, the flow of profane time is, for a brief instant, halted and replaced by what has been characterised by various writers as mythical time (Eliade 1959:35), cyclical and ritual time (Leach 1961:132-136 and 1976 respectively, ), sacred time and virtual time (Langer 1953:109). The ritual punctures the experience of durational time by creating a time which exists outside of ordinary time. At the beginning of Chapter 6 we saw how this was effected, at the level of structure and sequence, by the movement through the three phases of separation, transition and re-aggregation, the physical movement out of and back into the domain of the patient's ordinary experience, that is, the home. Underlying this commonly identified structure, however, is a series of fundamental switches in the expressive modes employed in the ritual which give experiential impact to the sense of discontinuity which the ritual creates between normal/non-normal, profane/sacred, mundane/ritual.

Thus in the Bali Tovil, the dominant expressive modes are song, dance, drama, artistic imagery, drumming and a host of other essentially non-ordinary modes which, once orchestrated in performance, demonstrate order and further more create the potential for the patient to experience a sense of order in the workings of the cosmos. It is the ordering of cultural elements in performance, often with



exaggerated precision, which sets the ritual apart from ordinary experience and highlights the very qualities of order and intentionality being conveyed.

Thus, an Adurā does not just cast incense onto a burning brazier each time in a ritual he wishes to attract the gaze of some deity or demon; if he is a good Adurā, he performs the act with balletic precision, exercising grace and co-ordination at all points in the exercise. He takes a pinch of the incense between his thumb, first and second fingers and in a slow arc raises it to his lips where he holds it, arm horizontal, third and fourth fingers erect, poised with the delicacy of a gentleman drinking tea. He intones mantra onto the powder and in a flourish casts the incense onto the brazier with striking dramatic effect.

In this consciously realised and highly stylised act, danced to the rhythm of the drum, the Adurā alerts the audience to actions which proclaim themselves as meaningful: the how becomes definitive of the action's meaning.

The ritual performances of the Beravā are constituted out of many self-referring expressive acts such as the one described above, all of which have to be carefully learned and practised over many years. [2] In performance they are woven together in regular and recognisable sequences which are repeated from occasion to occasion giving ritual its invariant form and power as a re-enacted archetype. Through the play on repetition and order, ritual:

'...imitates the rhythmic imperative of the biological and physical universe, thus suggesting a link with the perpetual processes of the cosmos. It thereby implies permanence and legitimacy of what are actually evanescent cultural constructs.'

(Moore and Myeroff 1977:8)

For this reason, the very morphology of ritual renders it a powerful 'traditionalising' instrument (ibid:7) capable of making new forms appear Traditional as well as perpetuating old ones. The style, formality and repetition which characterises ritual action and utterance continually shapes and orientates it to the past in a manner which mimics the formal message which it contains.

For example, the language employed throughout the ritual is rarely the language of ordinary discourse. Even the spoken request by the performers for permission to continue the ritual at the beginning of the second phase is delivered with a formality typical of a certain type of exaggerated public speaking. For the most part, language is sung, recited and chanted in various styles of poetry and song. The literal and discursive elements of language become subordinated to the mode in which they are presented, or, to use the Austinian term, are performed. To say something is also to do something, and, in ritual performance in particular, the form of expression comes to operate over and above the basic needs of communication. In performance, words come to mean more - or less, as Bloch would have it - than they would if taken alone (cf.

Tambiah 1968 and Bauman 1978). Perhaps the most extreme example of this in the ritual in question is to be found in the delivery of couplets in a language which is virtually unintelligible to the audience and only slightly less so to the performers. These are the Sanskrit verses (ślōka) delivered at the beginning of the ritual which are learned by rote by the performers, as is their limited exegesis. For the audience, however, the verses carry almost no literal meaning, aside from odd words which can be matched to actions which the performers carry out. This entirely presentational or illocutionary use of language further enhances an orientation to the past. Recitation of verses in an archaic language establishes a connection with the Brahmins and the Indian 'Great Tradition', and consequently the origin and source of the ritual. The verses provide an aperture to the past by means of which the participants are plunged into a reality beyond the here and now. Language, at its furthest from the secular and discursive, itself becomes symbolic of the source of present action and the means for its authentication. In a manner which is beyond the reach of the mind and of conceptual thought, the power of antiquity is evoked.[3] Objects and actions are introduced to the patient using a combination of obscure verses and direct sensory contact. The patient hears the bell which the Ḥdurā holds aloft in his hand and he also hears the verses in which reference to it is made, although he



cannot understand them. Likewise the curtain, thread, and mal baliya itself are presented as the archetypal objects which now, as then, will facilitate the cure.

In each context the use of ślōka couplets provides a linking device between present actions and their ancient source. They appear extensively in the first phase of the ritual and then figure less prominently at the beginning of each round of recitations for the dedication of each image. The movement, however, is not a simple one from present to past, it is also an inverse movement from past into present. As the recitations delivered in each of the dedications progress, the linguistic forms and conventions change and unfold in a move towards increasing intelligibility. The overall move implicit in the general structure of the ritual and reiterated in recursive loops throughout the dedications of the second phase of the ritual is from obscure Sanskrit to everyday words sung in popular form in Sinhala, moving through various combinations of spoken, sung and progressively accompanied verses. The form in which the recitations are progressively delivered echoes this movement from the source while also signifying the realisation in the present, of the powers that originally healed and charged in the beginning. From having a deficit meaning, the recitations come to have a surfeit of meaning as they are sung with vitality and embellished with vigorous dancing and drumming. The verses of the Head-to-foot poems are

used at the end of each dedication metaphorically to drive malevolence out of the body. In these episodes, language is no longer a meaningless accumulation of sounds but a positively anticipated flow of familiar words and concepts, which gathers its own momentum and force as they fall into easily recognisable rhythms and metres.

The temporal oscillation between source and present actions which is implicit in the styles of expression is further evinced from the structure of many of the Sinhalese verses which are delivered throughout the ritual. The syntax of many of these verses renders them very difficult to translate for they often appear as tenseless pastiches in which different temporal levels are telescoped within a single verse. The relationship between source and action is presented in what might best be described as an elliptical narrative in which past and present are continually superimposed one on top of another. For example, in a poem describing the origin of the 81-squared-mal baliya we find the following verse:

mē baliya sarasā āriyot nisi kota  
visal purata van jana pada rōgata  
vastrā pandurut dīlā sahatuta  
siyalu dōsa duruveyi mē baliyata

If this decorated baliya were  
appropriately revealed (opened)  
To the epidemic which is coming to Visāla  
And cloths and coins having been given  
with joy,  
Let all dos be cast onto this baliya.

The archetypal act of absorbing the dos which befell

Visāla in the form of the jana pada rōga onto the original mal baliya is given a certain simultaneity with the act of casting out dos which the patient himself effects during the ritual. It is because procedures which were followed then were effective that similar procedures followed in the present (and future) will also be effective.

This simultaneity at the semantic level is further echoed at a grammatical level. Michael Carrithers, whose knowledge of Sinhala is far greater than my own, has pointed out the odd mixing of moods which occurs in such verses (personal communication). For example, in the verse given above, the verb in line one is in the subjunctive, in line two it is a present participle, in line three it is an absolute and line four is an optative, with the overall effect that the listener can never be sure in temporal terms, which direction these various moods are directing him or her. The frequency with which this particular style of construction is used in this very popular genre would suggest that it is not just explicable in terms of the ineptitude of folk poets over the ages. It is not just bad poetry, but operates in the context in question as one of a number of technical devices which play on the relationship between mythical past and ritual present.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to what is possibly a universal device for creating a sense of



disjunction between ordinary time and ritual time, and that is music, and in particular drumming (cf. Needham 1967). Throughout the Bali Tovil, as with many other of the major rituals of the Beravā, drumming figures extensively. Drummers must pay careful attention to the art of rhythm (tāla śāstraya) which is used as a device for structuring the move between different recitations and phases. The humble drummer is not merely an accompanist but in many ways he is the orchestrator of the whole performance. He provides the lead for the singing and dancing and it is his changes in pace, intensification of rhythm and softening of sound which thread the overall progression of the ritual together.

Through the music of their drums the drummers play extensively on the perception of time, chopping it up according to the patterns of varied rhythm and tempo; sometimes drawing it out, other times bunching it together. Time is no longer experienced as duration and sequence, measured by the clock and experienced as the contrast of different states. It becomes, to use Langer's expression, 'an image of time in a different mode' (1953:111) that is, one in which time is lived or experienced as passage:

'...music spreads out time for our direct and complete apprehension, by letting our hearing monopolise it - organise, fill and shape it, all alone. It creates an image of time measured by the motion of forms that seem to give it substance, yet a substance that consists entirely of sound.

so it is transitoriness itself. Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity 'sensible.'

(ibid:110)

The time to which Langer refers, which I believe to be in essence the same as that created in rites of transition in general, is not one in which events can be located. It marks the cessation of ordinary social time (Leach 1961:134). The experience of music, and indeed its spatial counterpart, the dance, lifts the listener out of ordinary time and places him in the eternal present, the time which is no time. For this reason music becomes a fundamental means whereby a deep sense of tuning into the past can be articulated.

In this section I have described how in the appeal to Tradition in times of personal crisis, the Beravā provide a crucial nexus with the past, the time of mythical origins and archetypal events. Furthermore, I have given an account of some of the ways in which the style and formality of their ritual performance serves to realise a strong experiential connection or communion with powers which lie outside of any particular ritual enactment.

In conclusion, I would like to describe briefly one particular moment which is especially pregnant with a sense of Tradition and the deeply felt stirrings this arouses for performers and audience alike. This 'moment', as I have called it, occurs at the end of the first phase

of most major tovil and it is the stage at which the dancers present themselves to the audience. The first phase of the Bali Tovil, as we have seen, entails a slow build-up; there is much esoteric and obscure recitation with little to compel the attention of the audience. At the commencement of the second phase, however, which is the one in which most of the dancing and drumming takes place, the performers traditionally assemble in the centre of the arena. Still cool and not yet dishevelled by the exertions which are to follow, they survey their audience with an aloofness which borders on contempt. In exorcism ceremonies, the dancers blacken their eyes with charmed lampblack, which, as one performer put it, makes them as lions among sheep.

Usually, a spokesman in their midst declares their intention and recounts something of the ritual they are to perform. Few would confuse the imposing and authoritative figures they see before them at this point with the pathetic victims of social prejudice they might be outside of the arena. In this brief instant the performers stand proudly together as did their fathers and their grandfathers, visible manifestations of the strategies which give their traditions continuity and identity over time. Significantly, it was at this point that performers would insist that I took a photograph (cf. Plates IV and XII). For the audience, assembled in their greatest numbers at this point, the noble figures they see before



them signify a Tradition, a living link with the past. Costume and make-up erase individual identities of the dancers, who in their simple Brahmin-like garb, become timeless icons. Like Turner's "actors in 'flow'" (1977:48) they appear to be in total control of their action and environment, their every move, gesture and walk becomes a distinctive and powerful statement which commands attention. After this brief but striking instant the performers commence their nightlong dancing and singing, connecting themselves and their audience, for the duration of one night, with the wisdom of the ancients and the accumulated experience of the intervening generations.

### 7.3 An act of expression

Ritual, as we have seen, is transmitted and performed in a manner which should ideally be invariant from occasion to occasion. Furthermore, each occasion of ritual performance is characterised by highly formalised and stylised modes of expression. Ritual is sung, danced and chanted in a variety of languages and styles, with its messages, if they can be called that, embedded in forms of presentation which continually threaten to overpower and submerge anything we might identify as communication per se. Thus, for example, from the analysis presented in the previous section, we might conclude that, as far as the participants are concerned, the content of the ritual is only partially relevant, or indeed totally irrelevant, to

the way in which ritual achieves its impact. The Beravā, as a group socially and historically identified with certain types of knowledge and action, might just come along and perform, with authority, a ritual composed of well-executed nonsense but which still fulfills the criteria outlined above. In such an analysis of ritual, the medium does truly become the message, an approach which characterises that of Bloch (1977) and to a lesser extent Tambiah (1968). This, however, is an extreme characterisation of a very important argument. The content of ritual as I have shown, is effected and, indeed, considerably reinforced, by the manner in which it is expressed. Nevertheless, we should not overlook the fact that ritual does have the capacity to generate sentiments and ideas which can be reached through a formal analysis of the symbols, metaphors and imagery which are demonstrated and enacted before the patient and audience. There are key themes which relate directly to the patient's condition and these can be understood by deciphering the analogic code which the performers create from their actions, utterances and manipulation of objects.

The traditional anthropological approach to the study of ritual symbolism goes back primarily to Turner's unparalleled analysis of Ndembu symbolism (1967). 'Symbols are the smallest units of ritual which still retain the specific properties of the ritual' (ibid:19)

[4] and by careful examination of the use and characteristics of certain symbols we can arrive at their meanings and properties. We can understand what it is, other than itself, that the symbol stands for and the types of meanings it brings together (condensation) and the types it sets apart (polarisation). Symbols are thus like storage vessels and it is the task of the anthropologist to unpack the many meanings which each symbol has. In what Sperber has characterised as the 'cryptological approach', (1975:16) the aim is to uncover the multiple significata which in some sense lie waiting to be revealed within each symbol. Indeed, it is this multivalent or polysemic aspect of ritual symbols which sets them apart from ordinary discourse, in which we normally take one sign to have one meaning.

Leaving aside the very important critiques of this view (eg. Sperber 1975 [5]) I now undertake a brief exegesis and interpretation of the symbols which lie at the centre of the healing process which the Bali Tovil sets in motion and which further provide an external symbolic template for inner subjective experience and in turn offer the possibility of re-organising the former in terms of the latter.

The Bali Tovil is undoubtedly an ancient ritual and has inevitably been the subject of accretions and erosions over the centuries of its transmission and performance. Such a ritual would make a fascinating candidate upon



which to attempt, in the manner of Foucault, an archaeology of ritual, excavating the many layers of meaning which lie secreted in each ritual performance. To pursue all levels of meaning, however, would be a task of inordinate proportions. What I propose to do in this section is to select certain key themes and illustrate how these are demonstrated and re-iterated by means of symbol and metaphor during the course of a ritual performance. The themes which I have selected are the crucial Buddhist notions of rebirth and regeneration which recur repeatedly throughout the Bali Tovil. The ritual creates the possibility for the symbolic rebirth of the patient into a more auspicious state. A negative existence, that is, one in which the patient suffers misfortune, is symbolically terminated and a more positive one commenced.

### 7.3.1 The significance of the ritual stage

When the performers arrive at a house where they are to perform a ritual, they are confronted with what Peter Brook has called the 'empty space', a domain of theatrical possibility. In this context the 'empty space' is normally a domestic compound (midula), scene of the comings and goings of day to day routine. For the brief duration of the ritual, however, the performers create within this space a spectacular ritual arena (ranga mandalaya). They clear a floor and sanctify it with cow-dung and sandalwood and define its perimeter with

arches of sugar cane. As night falls the arena is bathed with artificial light from pressure lamps and flaming torches. The assembly of the audience around the arena's perimeter further serves to define the space in which the ritual will take place.

In ritual, as in drama, the creation of a stage, the marking off of a space by the use of lights, decoration and various other boundary producing devices separates off inside from outside, the sacred from the mundane. Like a frame around a picture, the stage created, however simple the devices it uses might be, serves to frame a particular reality and proclaim the significance and meaningfulness of everything that happens or can be found within it: it becomes a 'significance producing phenomena' (Esslin 1982:4). Gestures, objects and utterances once located within this space gain a significance that they otherwise would not have. Symbols become charged and metaphors resonant by virtue of being presented on a stage. This is the alerting quality of ritual, its power to say 'look and listen' rather than simply 'see and hear' (Lewis 1981:20). All the many objects assimilated into the ritual performance from the context of day to day life such as clay pots, oil lamps, coconut flowers etc. and even the actors themselves become representative of other things, once located on the ritual stage. They are transformed into images or a more general applicability which point to higher orders of meaning.

The elaborate arena created for the performance of a Bali Tovil, with its rich decoration and copious imagery, is said to be Nandana, the heavenly garden or park of the god Sakra. Throughout mythology, it is to Sakra that appeal is made in times of misfortune. (In the context of the Bali Tovil he is recalled as the god to whom Buddha gave instructions for the tying of a thread (pirit hūya) to the ailing King Vijaya.)

Malalasekera (1960:21) speaks of Nandavana (the Pāli equivalent) as one of the chief parks of the Tavatimsa heaven, the place where the gods, led by Sakra (Indra), go for their amusement. It is also the place where the gods go just before their deaths and in the midst of their reveries disappear to be reborn in their new stations. The impression which the Bali Tovil creates, consistent with this supra-mundane model, is one of abundance, prosperity and spectacle, as would befit a god in heaven.

The patient is brought into this place of heavenly transition and transformation in order to be given a new life. Significantly, the deities, ranged before the patient are also attracted and brought briefly to life in this place, only to have their life removed at the end of the ritual.

The patient enters the arena from his house carrying a traditional brass oil lamp. He is led out of the front door and crosses the physical boundary which separates the ritual arena from its surrounds.[6] The lamp he carries



aloft before him is of the type which figures prominently at various rites' of transition and in particular at domestic rites for the celebration of new year (alut avuruddu), the time at which the sun passes from Pisces (mina rasi) into Aries (mēsa rasi). Immediately prior to the transition of the sun (sankrāntiya) is a highly inauspicious period which culminates in the death of the old year with the setting sun and its rebirth with the sunrise. Significantly, many of the symbols used to absorb malevolence at this time are those used in the Bali Tovil. For example, at new year, a rice pounder (mol gaha), unhusked rice (hāl) and various kinds of sweetmeats are displayed on the verandah.

Once ensconced upon his dais or bed in the ritual arena, a wider spatial and temporal logic begins to elaborate the metaphor of death and rebirth. The orientation of the ritual arena is such that when the patient takes up his position he is in the west and facing him in the east are the line of Bali images. As we shall see, the images ranged in the east, suggests a link with the horoscope which is always determined according to the position of the planets and asterisms over the eastern horizon at the moment of birth.

The ritual commences as the sun sets behind the patient in the west (varuna), an inauspicious direction associated with decay and the god of death (Māra). Natural light is replaced by artificial light. For the

duration of the night it is the ritual itself which imitates and parallels the overall movements which the natural cycle of the sun creates. The images are dedicated from right to left, that is in an anti-clockwise direction. The patient is physically connected to these images by means of a thread which passes over the arena and down into his hand. Blessings are repeatedly pronounced over his head and, by means of the head-to-foot poems, the dos is driven down his body and out through his toes, echoing once again an overall anti-clockwise movement which reduplicates that of the setting sun. The whole cyclical movement is further dynamised by the dancers who whirl and spin between the opposite poles represented by the patient and the assembled images.

In the early morning, the sun rises behind the array of images, assembled in the auspicious east (indradiḡa) causing light to burst through the gaps in their flimsy bamboo frames. What were, with artificial light cast upon them, images of considerable power and authority, become dark and dull as natural light is cast from behind them. As the new day comes into being the patient sees before him, as in the horoscope, the astrological determinants of his fate, as well as the various agents who bring it to fruition. Unlike before, however, the orientation of these agents has been positively changed; they have received offerings and have bestowed their blessings upon the patient.

Within the natural cycle of sunset and sunrise, darkness to light and between the poles of west and east, the localised rhythms of the ritual are reflected and metaphorically reduplicated in the symbolic death and rebirth of the patient, as in the diagram overleaf:



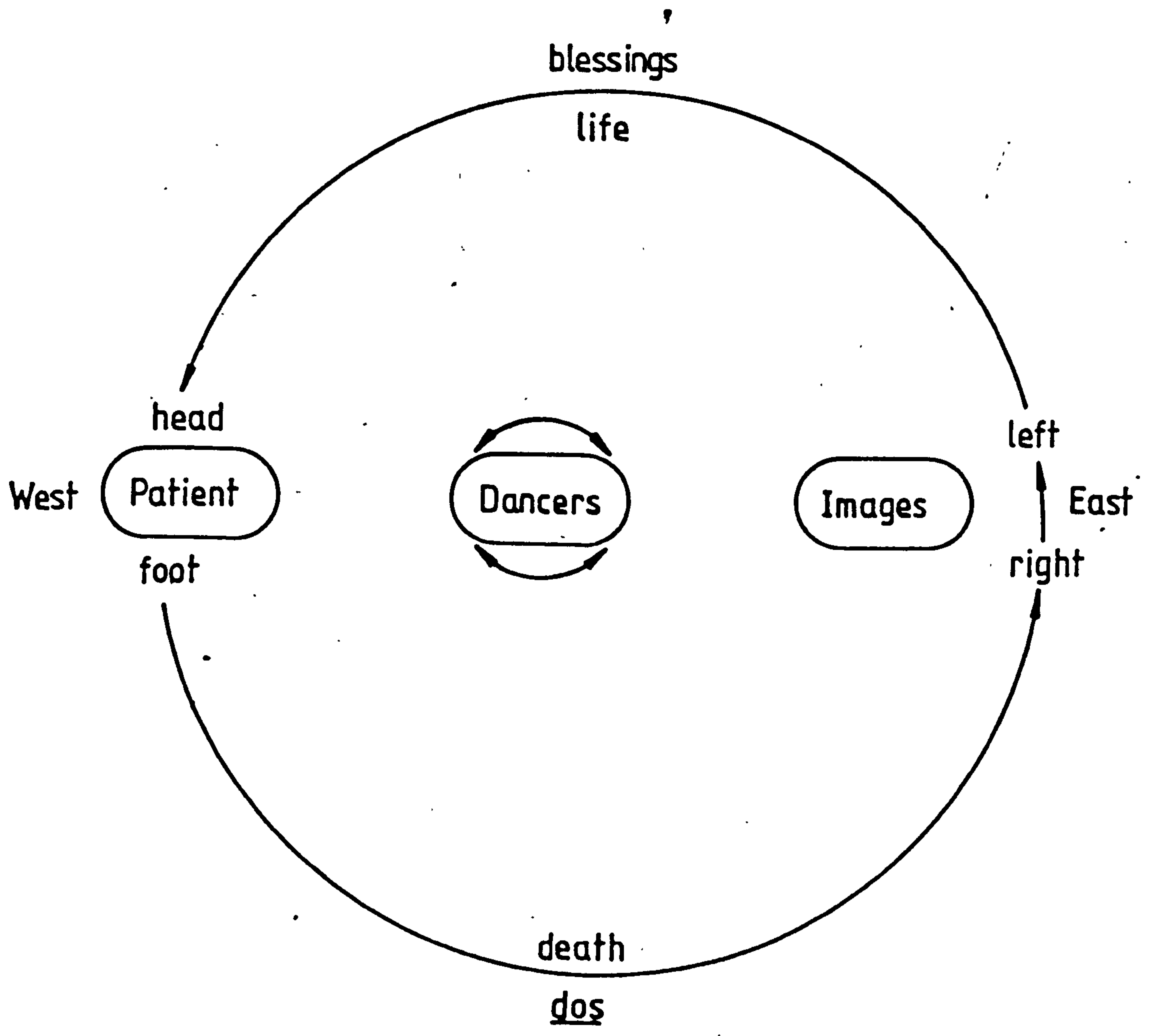


Figure 15. Spatial movements in the Bali Tovil

The patient receives the blessing of the assembled deities, metonymically through the thread which connects him directly to them and metaphorically through their gaze under which he sits.[7] The bestowal of blessings upon the patient gives impact to the removal of dos from his body, and, through a series of exchanges, it is dispatched onto the mal Baliya and assembled imagery. The dos is absorbed by the auspicious objects of the ata magala which lie at his feet and it is absorbed by the clean white cloth which he moves down his body in the final sirasapāda. The ritual culminates with a series of acts in which the patient physically casts away the various objects and offerings which are believed to have accumulated the dos. He casts away the white cloth, he casts away offerings of betel leaves and coins and by a series of casting motions from his head he removes dos from himself. In casting away the lime and thread he severs his connection with the now polluted sources of blessing. This separation is further reinforced by the casting of flames (kīla gāsīma) which serves to metaphorically cauterise the images within the arena. Following this they are disposed of as mere lifeless lumps of clay and rapidly decaying bits of banana tree trunk and coconut leaf.

The ritual is brought to a close with the patient making the inverse journey of the one he made eighteen hours previously, that is, he takes the lighted brass oil

lamp and walks back into his house.

### 7.3.11 Making offerings: nourishing existence

The word Bali means offering and the notion of making offerings of various kinds is clearly central to the performance of a Bali Tovil. Yet this most crucial aspect of the ritual is far from straightforward. In this section I offer a number of possible interpretations of the various types of offering made in the ritual. Firstly, this is done with respect to the act of offering to beings which are believed to exist in the world(s) outside of the patient. Secondly, the notion of offering is examined in the more figurative sense in which the whole ritual becomes a massive act of offering of which the patient himself is the recipient. First, however, I consider the act of placing offerings into the mal baliya.

Undoubtedly, the placing of grains and seeds (ġta) of rice and sesame into the wombs (gġba) of the mal baliya utilises the rebirth imagery suggested above. ġta means sperm [8] and the dancers repeatedly convey offerings of ġta from the patient to the mal baliya. This imagery gains further resonance when it is recalled that the Magul Bera, performed at the beginning of the ceremony, is an invocation to Gandharva Divya Putra, the celestial musician (see page 343). In Indian mythology this deity was not just a celestial musician:



'...the Gandharva was associated also in mythology with the 'cosmic waters' which existed before the creation of the world. From both these ideas, the Ghandarva came to be linked with the ideas of generation of life, of birth from the womb.

(Collins 1982:211)

In Buddhism such ideas became assimilated in the concept of gandhabba, a spirit or ghost believed to descend at the moment of conception. Without this spirit descending, conception, and hence (re)birth cannot take place (loc cit). It is tempting to ask whether the dancers and drummers symbolically represent the descending spirit of Gandharva and the process of regeneration this makes possible. Any answer to such a question, however, must be tempered by the knowledge that it is unlikely that any informant would ever spontaneously suggest or even recognise such chains of reasoning, convincing though they are. It was often the case that what appeared to the outsider as the most blatant of sexual and reproductive symbolism would remain quite unconscious, and any suggestion that certain ritual objects did have such referents would evoke astonishment and even indignation on the part of informants.

This interpretation, latent as it might be for my informants, may account for certain aspects of offering seeds to the mal baliya, but it does not take us very far in understanding the complex exchanges which the Bali Tovil puts into effect. In order to do this we need to

look at the wider imagery and significance of food in Buddhist thought, and in particular the idea of food as metaphorically nourishing existence, both physically and mentally.

The act of giving food offerings to gods and spirits is one of considerable antiquity. From Vedic times the act of giving food was associated with the notion of sustaining the existence of beings which exist outside this world (Collins, 1982:209). In the light of this extensive and very popular belief, we might put forward an interpretation of the act of placing rice grains and other foods such as sweetmeats into the mal baliya, as an act which gives metaphorical sustenance to a host of deities and spirits. Planets, stars, deities and demons are all brought to life through the act of offering, which in effect creates the cosmos.

In the Bali Tovil this act of creation is not simply an abstract philosophical idea but as we saw in the previous chapter, one which is demonstrated in the very act of ritual performance. Deities and demons are fashioned out of clay, they are brought to life and given sight and power. Their colour, form and appearance is brought to the attention of those who gaze upon them, through detailed descriptive poems. These images are not just offered food; their offerings also include incense, rosewater, a mirror and many other objects which 'feed' the senses. In a very graphic manner the cosmos is

created for the patient and given the possibility of continuity of time.

In suggesting that the act of offering (baliya) performed by the Beravā is an act in which the cosmos is created we move very close to the notion of ritual thought to be held by the Brahmins whom the Balikārayā emulate in the Bali Tovil. The classic view of Brahmanic ritual is the performance of sacrifice on behalf of a patron with the intention of producing an ordered sequence of time in which to live (ibid:41-42). It is only through correctly performed ritual sacrifice that there could be the possibility of a future life in time. The act of performing and constructing a ritual created both the self or person of the sacrificer and the time in which they were to live. The act of sacrifice was a constant effort at the prolongation and pushing forward of life.

While certain features of the Bali Tovil such as the dress of the Bali performers, reference to the ritual as a sacrifice (yāgaya) and superficial similarities of the mal baliya to the Vedic fire altar (cf. Eliade 1959:79), might lead one to speculate on survivals and continuities from ancient times, it is unlikely that these speculations would carry much substance given the time span involved. However, the idea that a Bali Tovil, with its elaborate offerings and imagery, is an attempt to construct both a self and a future life in time is nonetheless highly apt in view of the period of astrological misfortune which the



patient is experiencing. On a cognitive level, fate cannot be changed and, as we saw in Chapter 5, it is pointless trying to influence the planets and stars; they are to all intents and purposes amoral. Yet, on an affective level, much of the behaviour we see in the Bali Tovil strongly suggests the possibility that fate can be influenced. The ritual does construct a future which is prosperous, healthy and happy. The ultimate catastrophe of untimely death (akala marana) is replaced by the lengthening of life (āyu bō vē). Whatever the philosophical stance of the person at the centre of a Bali Tovil he should end up being persuaded that from that point on the future is going to be better.

However, to view the Bali Tovil in terms of a cognitive/affective split is to ascribe to a very particular conception of the relationship between Buddhism and popular culture. In this view Buddhism is presented as an elegantly intellectual but ultimately fragile tapestry of ideas and concepts which never quite stretches to encompass popular psychology: the tapestry continually frays at the edges and the magical-animist-apotropaic substratum which lurks within every frightened and uncertain human being continually threatens to burst through.

Is there then, any way we can overcome this rather synthetic split between the head and the heart? Has the development of Buddhism over the past 2500 years really failed to penetrate the deeper layers of the Indian

mentality?

It is unlikely that we will ever usefully be able to dispense with the oral-literate, great/little, folk/textual oppositions which characterise the study of religion in societies with a complex historical and literate tradition. However, as our knowledge of these opposed analytical levels becomes more refined, it should be possible to understand with greater precision how these different levels are integrated. Rather than understanding the opposition in diachronic terms, that is, as earlier, aberrant survivals of modes of thought and action, we should be able to approach the oppositions in synchronic terms, that is, to look at how performances such as the Bali Tovil elaborate and reinforce in structural terms, an overall logic. In constructing this logic we will be able to see how in practical terms the abstract concepts and categories upon which the edifice of Buddhism rests are thought about and acted upon at the popular level.

If we reach deep into the categories and concepts which inform the Bali Tovil and give it its resonance as a ceremony appropriate for performance to Buddhists, there is ultimately a point at which there is a congruence or overlap of ideas and imagery. A key area of overlap in the Bali Tovil is that concerning ideas about human existence, its perpetuation and continuity. Just as earlier ideas about the continuity of existence were based

on the notion that offering food sustained beings outside the world, so, in Buddhism the imagery of food came to occupy a central place as the necessary pre-requisite for the continued existence of the shifting internal configuration of forces and impulses we take to be the person or self. Existence and experience will continue as long as there is physical and mental material to nourish it. The instruments of continuity, or the Four Foods (āhāra), specified in Buddhism are: solid/physical food, sense impressions, consciousness and mental volitions. These foods are 'essential for the maintenance of beings that exist or are seeking to exist' (Collins 1982:210).

At root both the *Balikārayā* and the Buddhist priest operate with essentially the same imagery to account for the continuity of existence: where they differ is in the purposes to which they elaborate this imagery.

The aim of virtuoso Buddhism is to realise a state in which the continuity of the self is brought to an end as is the time in which it exists; the ultimate nirvanic snuffing out of desire. The path upon which a priest embarks in order to achieve this end is one which is above all else ascetic, that is, it is one which requires him to control and starve the senses and ultimately eliminate desire for the kinds of 'foods' which result in the chain of cause and effect which we know as *Samsāra*.

The *Balikārayā* on the other hand is involved in the opposite process. Through his rituals he is actively



involved in feeding the senses and supplying the 'foods' which drive a person on and affirm existence in future time. The ritual continually affirms the desire to live and exist; to extend life for the patient. This, incidentally, also entails the continuity of life in society and, given the importance of food in the literal sense at these occasions, one could speculate on the significance of feeding the assembled guests as an act of creating and perpetuating the community.

With such a view of the deeper symbolic intentions of the Bali Tovil we arrive at the fundamental opposition between the path of the priest and the path of the layman. The aim of the former is to cease existence, the aim of the latter is to perpetuate it in order to attain the more modest ambition of a better rebirth. An ambition, incidentally, which is repeatedly demonstrated and given reinforcement in the Bali Tovil by the recitation of poems which tell various Jātaka stories, that is, tales of Buddha's many previous lives and his gradual ascent through many rounds of birth and rebirth.

To attain better rebirth it is necessary to accumulate merit and this can only be achieved if one is successful in moral and material terms in this world. A bad astrological period threatens this success by removing one's power to act effectively. The performance of a Bali Tovil can offer the possibility of restoring this power by an intensive effort to generate the positive and life

affirming experiences which create and give continuity to the individual and the cosmos. The individual is located in a state of maximum intellectual and moral hygiene from which to embark on a continuing life in the round of Samsāra. As Collins (1982:265) has pointed out, the imagery most frequently used to illustrate the flow of Samsāra in popular terms has been that of agriculture: planting seeds and reaping their fruit. Thus, it is no surprise at all to find that a person suffering from the effects of a 'fruitless period' (aphala kālaya) is placed at the centre of an arena which is adorned with fruit which has to be ripe; a powerful metaphorical statement of the desired outcome of the ritual.

#### 7.4 An act of performance

In sections two and three of this Chapter, I have examined certain aspects of the Bali Tovil from the perspective of the Tradition it represents and the ideas and concepts it demonstrates. In both cases the emphasis has been on ritual as an invariant form, ideally reproduced with little change from occasion to occasion. The style and structure of the event creates an orientation to the past and a time and space outside of the world of day to day experiences.

This, however, is only one side of the ritual coin. If we are to offer suggestions as to how a healing ritual begins to achieve its operational efficacy, that is, how

its symbols and metaphors can become charged and potent, and the experience of the past comes to be felt rather than merely thought about, then we must consider ritual as a total act of performance or 'dramatic multilogue' (Babcock 1978:294) which relates directly to the lives and experience of its participants in any particular instant. In figurative terms, we need to ask how each separate performance succeeds in bringing closer the ultimate realities of the cosmos to fit the variable and local needs of its patrons from performance to performance. As well as being the enactment of ideally invariant styles, patterns and techniques of performance, each event is also unique in space and time and linked to the status aspirations of its participants.

In order to understand these more 'total' aspects of ritual we must look at the wider framework in which ritual is located. We must look at areas which lie outside the traditional communication/message approach to ritual which requires us to reduce ritual performance to a 'tight total structure for meaning' (Barth 1975:209). These areas, as far as anthropologists are concerned, are the secondary and extraneous features of ritual, but for the participants they are of primary importance. Expenditure, preparations, invitations to guests, offering hospitality, decorating the house and the general clutter and bustle which accompanies each event are ultimately what creates the tension and intensification of orientation which



accompanies each performance. This tension, if suitably generated, can make ritual work and give it its power to persuade. The untidiness or 'noise' which typifies even the most serious of ritual performances should not be viewed as simply interference with the messages conveyed in the key symbols of the ritual, but, on the contrary, this is often the very means of its appropriation by the participants. In essence, a healing ritual such as the Bali Tovil, brings about a dual movement: the universalisation of a particular disorder or condition and the particularisation of a universal cosmos.

This closely intertwined movement is set in train from the time of the initial diagnosis of an astrologically bad period and in particular from the time of the decision to hold a Bali Tovil. From this time there is a progressive disruption of daily routine for the patient and his family over the weeks leading up to the ritual. Resources must be gathered and preparations, of both a practical and social kind, made for the event. Prior to each major ritual there is a gathering of social momentum and an increasing sense of tension and strain, none of which has anything to do with the ritual actions of the Berava per se. As the preparation and organisation of the ritual progress, the event comes to define its own space and the anticipation of its outcome. The larger the size of the ritual, the greater the effort and expenditure which goes into it and, consequently, the

greater the emotional and cathartic impact of the event. Large expenditure, the extent to which someone suffers materially in putting on a ritual, augments considerably the possibility that the patient will be persuaded of an efficacious and beneficial outcome to the ritual. One could well imagine that, after weeks of preparation and organisation, a struggle to accumulate financial and material resources, psychological tension immediately prior to a performance and then over twelve hours of intense, fused, ritual action and utterance, the point at which the patient casts the cloth onto the mal baliya is a genuinely cathartic act. This act, in view of the lengthy build up to its performance, becomes a deeply felt casting off of all the troubles and worries which the patient feels during a bad planetary period. The condition which the ritual has metaphorically elaborated over many hours through recursive loops, repeated structures and rhythmic repetitions in song, dance and drumming, is thus removed, with striking effect, through a series of metonymical acts. Objects which, through their contiguity with the patient, have absorbed dos, are physically thrown by him onto the mal baliya. There are no words at the points when the objects are thrown, simply the acts themselves with a signification which is open-ended with respect to the patient and his condition.

A further factor which gives enormous poignancy to

such acts is that they are publicly witnessed by the assembled audience. Each ritual event, as we saw in Chapter 4, brings together and activates an audience who are in fact a partial configuration of the community as it is centred on the patient: the audience is indeed created by the patient. Many members of this community will have been drawn into the ritual process by providing crucial practical and financial support as each event triggers off its own networks of exchange and reciprocity. The audience, as community, also gives its emotional support to the patient by their attendance at his event. At the beginning of the ritual they all affirm their unity as Buddhists and, explicitly at least, express a desire for the patient's well-being within the shared moral order of Buddhism.

Unlike exorcism ceremonies which are based on the process of elaborating two contradictory realities, that of the demonically afflicted and that of the healthy non-afflicted (Kapferer 1977:104), the Bali follows an essentially linear structure. Rather than the re-integration of two things which have come apart, the accent in the Bali is on something akin to the process of individuation [9], the centering and strengthening of the self within a supportive and non-contradictory reality.

The patient is centered in his community. He is centered within a cosmos which is fashioned according to his particular needs and circumstances. His wealth,



social status and social personae are publicly demonstrated in the display of imagery which he can afford and which also serves as an index of his individuality. In subjecting himself to the space and time which the ritual performance elaborates he creates the possibility of experience and of his own persuasion of a self transformation. Through processes which imitate the fundamental truths of death and rebirth, growth and decay, the planting of seeds and the reaping of crops, the patient is persuaded to feel that a bad period is brought to a close and he is 'reborn' into a new and brighter condition.

#### Notes to Chapter 7

[1] Frank (1974) provides some interesting perspectives on this question from the standpoint of psychotherapy. Of particular interest is his account of non-medical healing techniques in primitive societies (ibid:46-77).

[2] On a number of occasions I was given the opportunity to try some of the ore simple actions which figure in tovil performances. The extent of body control and physical awareness necessary to do even the most elementary of actions proved quite beyond my capabilities.

[3] Weightman (1982:56-57) comes to a similar conclusion concerning the evocation of a sense of unity with a deeper cultural tradition. His example describes the performance of the Rāmacaritmānas or extracts from the Ramayāna written by the medieval poet Tulsidas. These are presented using a high proportion of unintelligible Hindi words which 'derive their power solely from the prestige of their origins' (ibid:55). A similar case could perhaps be made with respect to the appreciation of opera in the west.

[4] This style of symbolic analysis ultimately owes its origin to Freud's interpretation of symbols in dreams. Its assimilation into anthropology can be traced via Saussure (1916) who in his course of linguistics advocated

that rites be studied as part of a science of semiology. In anthropology it was Radcliffe-Brown (1939) who proposed the analogy between morphemes and the units of ritual.

[5] In brief, this critique asks the important question: if we can present the meanings of a symbol simply as a set of linguistic paraphrases, then why go to the trouble of using symbols in rituals, a use which is invariably elaborate and time consuming? Secondly, this critique raises the question of the creativity of symbols, their capacity to continually work reality into meaningful patterns by their acquisition of new meanings. Indeed, Sperber goes so far as to assert that 'symbols are not signs, they are not paired with their interpretations in a code structure. Their interpretations are not meanings.' (ibid:85)

[6] See Collins (1982:161-171) for some of the sociological and psychological resonances of house imagery in Buddhist thought and in particular the act of leaving the house which is repeatedly used to symbolise the cutting of ties and the cessation of consciousness.

[7] See Babb (1981) for example, who has drawn attention to the widespread significance of eyes, eye contact and the gaze throughout South Asia. In particular he demonstrates the role of the gaze of deities in the act of worship in which it is the gaze of the deities which transfers their power to the worshipper.

[8] Another word for semen is sukra which is also the name for Venus, the planet who is the regent of the east, the direction in which the Bali images should ideally be located. The word for east is Indradiga, the 'direction of Indra'. Indra and Sakra are the same deity and it is their abode which is recreated in the ritual!

[9] In the strict Jungian sense, individuation is characterised as a spiritual quest, typically undertaken in later life and essentially concerned with the process of coming to terms with death (Storr 1973:80-93). My own use of the term is in the more general sense of 'making individual', but there are a number of significant points at which the Jungian notion of individuation might prove highly illuminating in the analysis of the Bali Tovil.





Plate XV. The mask of the Kalas Pāliya (from the parade of the eighteen Sanni Demons).



## CHAPTER 8

### TOURISM AND THE COMMODITISATION OF 'TRADITIONS'

#### 8.1 Introduction

In the previous seven chapters we have seen how the traditions of the Beravā are closely woven into the texture of social relations within the caste, and how the possession, performance and transmission of these traditions provides a source of identity and a means of livelihood for certain sectors of the Beravā community. We have further seen how such traditions are embodied in powerful ritual forms which have the expressed intention and potential to transform sickness into health and disorder into order. A central theme throughout this analysis of the Beravā and their traditions has been the notion of continuity and an orientation to the distant, mythical past. This continuity is embodied not only in the things they do but also significantly in the way they do them: they not only perform rituals which are believed to have been passed down from antiquity, the Beravā also

attempt to reduplicate the relationships and roles of those who performed such rituals in the past. The process of cultural reproduction for which the Beravā are known and recognised within the wider society is also a crucial element in their own social reproduction. By virtue of who they are and what they do, the Beravā, as a social category, are firmly located at the lower end of the caste hierarchy.

In the course of this chapter, however, I explore what happens when this whole system is brought under threat and the values upon which it rests challenged at their very roots. What happens when the use value of traditions, their function in cultural and social reproduction, acquire exchange value, that is, they become the means whereby commodities can be produced and sold for cash? The sources of change focussed upon in this instance are tourism and the consequent development of a market for cultural artefacts which, as we shall see, the Beravā are particularly appropriate to enter.

The changes brought about have critical consequences for the Beravā and the social context in which they have traditionally operated. In the face of the capitalist penetration which tourism ultimately represents, the complexity and temporal depth of the traditions of the Beravā, far from being a source of stability and rootedness, become a source of vulnerability. Just as a tree which has taken hundreds of years to grow can be cut

down in a matter of hours, so, traditions, which represent the accumulation of knowledge and social experience over many generations, can be irretrievably lost in a matter of years once the context of production is changed. With this loss also goes the dislocation of the social framework upon which traditions hang. As the significance of relationships comes to be evaluated according to wholly different criteria, yet another step is taken away from the 'Golden Age' enshrined in the relationships of previous kinsmen.

In this respect, tourism does not just affect the Beravā, nor just Sinhalese society, but is a world-wide phenomenon which brings changes of an order which we are only beginning to comprehend, to societies and communities everywhere. The exchange of capital for commodity and the particular form this exchange takes in the tourist market strikes at the root of the host culture and blights the very richness and diversity which we, as anthropologists, strive to demonstrate and preserve. Ultimately, tourism may prove to be the single most potent factor in reducing the content of chapters one to seven to the status of historical novelty. For this reason, if no other, the present chapter provides an antithesis to my thesis in that it examines the effects of tourism upon the relatively stable structures which enable the Beravā to reproduce their traditions. In so doing I examine how the Beravā are being drawn into the tourist market and how, in



one particular instance, these changes are being apprehended by those most centrally involved.

## 8.2 Tourism in Sri Lanka

In recent years, tourism in Sri Lanka has undergone unprecedented growth. It is nowadays no longer the preserve of a relatively limited, globe-trotting elite but has come well within the horizons of European package tour operators. The 1977 change of government from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (S.L.F.P.) to the United National Party (U.N.P.) heralded a new era in the growth of tourism. The U.N.P. came to power with a massive mandate committed to policies which would firmly integrate the nation into international markets. An open door economic policy and low exchange rates combined with the salubrious disposition of the 'island paradise' have made Sri Lanka an attractive tourist proposition, bringing in tour operators from all over the world and in particular Germany and Scandinavia.

In the development strategy of the present government tourism occupies a crucial role. With little need for exports or elaborate infrastructure, tourism creates employment, provides a lucrative area for private investment and, most important, it earns foreign exchange. Under such conditions the more ambiguous aspects of tourism are overlooked in the interests of national development. Attempts to control the pervasive spread of

tourists have floundered as the number of tourists rises steeply each year.[1] Similarly, efforts to confine the tourist presence through policies of enclave or resort tourism have broken down as more and more people clamour to enter the lucrative trade possibilities which tourists bring. For example, the South and West coasts are now almost a continuous string of different types of tourist accommodation, ranging from the luxurious beach hotels to the cadjan huts erected at the road side for less formal tourists. Once small coastal villages and towns, such as Beruvala, now sprawl for miles along the coast as more people jump on the tourist bandwagon, buying land and property from which they can do 'bisnisi' with the tourists.

As Smith (1977:9) has observed, the larger the number of tourists, the greater has to be the act of accommodation on the part of the hosts. As tourism develops, the guests seek, expect and come to demand western amenities. With the rise of new market possibilities in the tourist industry local entrepreneurs and suppliers respond quickly. The tourist must be catered for at every level.

Using the definition of a tourist as a 'temporarily leisured person', Smith (op cit:10) has drawn up a classification of the various types of tourist activity: these include recreational, environmental, historical, cultural and ethnic tourism. In Sri Lanka the conditions

for each of these types of activity are excellent: 'recreational tourism' of the sun, sand and sport variety; 'environmental tourism' in the astonishing beauty and wildlife of the island; and 'historical tourism' in the ancient cities and the powerful civilisations they represent, are all readily available and, both at a government and local level, energies have been directed to exploit these attractions to the full.

However, it is to the final category of tourism, that of cultural and ethnic tourism, to which I draw attention in this chapter. An important aspect of the tourist ideology is that one learns something of the society in which one finds oneself and gets a taste of the 'local colour'. Travel broadens the mind and seeing how the other half lives may add new dimensions to one's perceptions at home. The experience of other cultures has further come to carry enormous prestige as part of a value system in which escape and adventure are sanctioned in the vacation, the period in which one is 'temporarily leisured'.

For the host society to make the most of its 'cultural' and 'ethnic' tourist possibilities, particularly in the face of rising numbers of tourists, culture must be made available and presentable, packaged for consumption into easily digestible chunks. In a relatively short space of time it is necessary to instil a fleeting sense of Sinhaleseness, if for no other reason



than to make it distinguishable from other places visited and to be visited. Not all aspects of culture, however, are amenable to the process of commoditisation necessary if culture is to be exchanged for capital. The nature of the transaction between tourists and their hosts limits considerably the types of cultural expression which can successfully lend themselves as saleable commodities. Ultimately, as we shall see, capital subtly determines the nature of the commodity, bringing it in line with the expectation of the tourist consumer. Before examining this process in more detail it is perhaps appropriate to say a little about the more general effects of tourism upon Sinhalese society.

### 8.3 Local attitudes to tourists

Ensconced in my village on the outskirts of a provincial market town about twenty miles from the well-trodden tourist path which runs along the coast from Negombo to Hambantota, I, like those among whom I lived rarely encountered the 'sudu mahattayō', 'the white gentleman'. Unless, that is, one went to the coast, where the ever changing but remarkably consistent tourist presence could be seen, promenading, photographing and purchasing gems from the same one-eyed man who insists that he does not sell his stones at discount price to every foreigner he meets.

Not everyone, however, is able to entice money from

the palms of foreigners and, even if they were, many would decline to do so. For the majority who stand on the sidelines, watching tourists with a mixture of envy, disgust and indifference, the tourist is a distant and highly ambiguous entity.

On the one hand, there is something of a tourist mythology which has percolated into the most isolated of areas. For many living in rural areas, tourists and tourism have taken on an almost millenarian appeal. Providing an apparently accessible source of wealth and power, tourists and tourism will bring in a new phase in the island's development. Such attitudes were particularly discernible among young men in towns and villages, for whom foreigners could provide a means of circumventing a strongly hierarchical system in which they were doomed to economic impotence. Finding a good foreigner was like winning the state lottery or finding a gem, and stories abounded of the benevolence of foreign gentlemen (and women) who had given cars, houses, air tickets to the new world and the like, all as a result of the simple act of befriending them. The discrepancy of living standards between hosts and guests is great enough, in most instances, to give such tales a grain of truth.

The power which tourists represent, however, is often seen to be abused. Tourists are whimsical and unpredictable, they are inclined to eat anything, buy anything and do anything: they are on holiday! The

inversion of everyday norms and personal characteristics for the purposes of self-rejuvenation is, however, not a concept readily graspable for most Sinhalese who, from their own cultural perspective, come to view tourists as powerful but anomalous, accessible yet intractable. As one old man put it, "they are like the gods, the only thing they can't do is fly through the air".

As well as signifying the coming of a new order as the auspicious articulators of power, tourists are also seen negatively as the agents of a value system antithetical to traditional beliefs and values and in particular those of Buddhism. Massive consumption of resources, excessive meat eating and alcohol consumption, nudity on beaches, sexual misconduct and a general disregard for custom and courtesy, often entirely unintended, leave many Sinhalese with a negative attitude towards tourists. While many 'proper' minded commentators openly express abhorrence at the corruption of morals which such behaviour sets in train, the overall material benefits of overlooking this view would appear to outweigh those of doing anything about it. Tourists by and large are seen in a positive light, they are made welcome and their excesses tolerated, if not facilitated, in the interests of the national economy.

#### 8.4 The Beravā and the tourist market

The ritual performance of healing and exorcism, the



'devil dance' as it has come to be known, has fascinated foreign observers for over three hundred years. Some of the earliest references to 'devil dancing' are to be found in seventeenth century Portuguese and later Dutch accounts of travel in the island. Subsequent foreign visitors and residents have also found a place for these rituals in their accounts, ranging from light-hearted articles in popular journals to major anthropological researches (see Chapter 4, notes 1-5).

In the present, the image of the 'devil dance' is one that 'culture brokers' are finding increasingly appropriate to present to tourists. The notion of the 'devil dance' is one which readily captures the imagination and, possibly, extends back into our own mythologies.

The term 'devil dance', although a literal translation of the name of a particular sequence within certain exorcism ceremonies (yakṣa nṛtūm) is now used as a blanket term by outsiders to designate a large portion of the performative folk arts of the Southern Province. The term includes a wide variety of ceremonies in which dance, costume, masking and music, figure in the celebration and assertion of 'primitive' beliefs.

From these ceremonies arise a rich array of images which are highly suggestive for a non-indigenous audience. They are furthermore images which can be easily manipulated for presentation to such an audience. The

appeal which these forms have to tourists stems primarily from their mode of presentation. The fleeting contact which tourists have with their host culture limits considerably the channels for communication. Factors of time, language and lack of prior cultural information dictate that statements concerning the culture of the host must be simple and concise. The emphasis is necessarily on a visual mode of presentation, a spectacle which has impact without the necessity to understand its meaning: the meaning can reside quite happily in the eye of the beholder.

As such the 'devil dance' finds a ready niche in the kaleidoscope of events which comprise the tourist experience. The visual and ecstatic mode of presentation, the dancing, masking, drumming and costume provide suitable typifications of the exotic and mysterious (a word in vogue with the writers of tourist brochures). The tourist can step back and dip into a world both wild and primitive, a 'disappearing world'. The media used in the 'devil dance' performances are further consistent with the expectation of tourists in that they readily transcend the limitations of any one culture: any one can respond at some level to dance irrespective of its true contextual meaning: dances which heal become dances which entertain. The media of the devil dance need little or no discursive interpretation in their own terms. The content of the 'devil dance' when

presented to a tourist audience becomes a set of signs rather than a set of symbols. As Ben-Amos says of tourist art in general, it:

'...operates as a minimal system which must make meanings as accessible as possible across visual boundary lines...  
[a] reduction in semantic level of traditional forms, expansion of neo-traditional motifs and utilisation of adjunct communication systems.'

(quoted in Graburn 1976:25)

If the cross-cultural transaction is to be successful, the emphasis must necessarily shift from what the producers produce to what the consumer wants.

The necessity for short, concise and essentially visual modes of presentation is at odds with the view of many Beravā ritual activities outlined in earlier chapters which are decidedly not short and concise but are long, convoluted repetitious and contain much in the way of recitation. In the transposition of such performances for consumption by tourists the potential for a radical re-evaluation of various traditions is inevitable. The selection of various aspects or strands of tradition in order that more suitable and appealing features be brought to the fore breaks down the collective and holistic inter-weaving of traditions which characterises the usual performances of the Beravā. The intricate hierarchy of skill and excellence, which performers of all categories endeavour to ascend, is challenged as the possibility of achieving status and wealth outside the traditional system emerges.



Tourists, and the lucrative possibilities they bring, offer for some B'aravā the possibility of over coming the restrictions of low-caste status by applying the knowledge and skills, which to a great extent have been the source of their lowly status, in a wholly different context. Just how this process is brought about will be illustrated with reference to two traditional caste activities which, for the reasons outlined above, are finding great favour with tourists. These are dancing and mask-making, both of which have developed as an integral part of the 'devil dance' Tradition and are specialist activities in which members of the caste excel.

#### 8.5 Devil dancing: from healing to entertainment

In the context of ritual performance dance is an integral component in the overall performative effect. The precise execution of steps and movements is believed to attract and excite deities and demons who in turn bring relief to the afflicted. Juxtaposed with other forms of expression, dance embodies and articulates many complex sentiments; as a primarily presentational mode of symbolic action its use in ritual coincides with heightened states and an awareness of the sacred. In conveying such states in the context of performance, a dancer must bring together in himself many skills and techniques: singing, recitation, knowledge of drumming and rhythm and extensive knowledge of the theory and practice of exorcism.

Transposed into a 'cultural performance' for a tourist audience a good deal of knowledge and skill is rendered redundant. The expression is primarily visual, highly selective and oriented to the spectacular.

The dancing displays which are becoming increasingly popular in the South are following a precedent set by the more organised troupes of the Kandyan Highlands. Dancing for tourists has gone on around Kandy for many years and in many ways has become the lifeblood of the dancing Tradition, often at the expense of its roots in the rural Sinhala community. A pattern well-established in the Highlands is beginning to crystallise in the South as more entrepreneurs exploit the 'devil dance' Tradition and its distinctive regional associations.

Most of the larger tourist hotels now offer, as part of their standard 'fare', cultural items for the edification of tourists. These include the dances of costumed schoolgirls and many of the masked dances which accompany exorcism. Many smaller establishments also now put on such displays, recruiting performers locally for the performance of short items of cultural interest. Punters are gathered by diligent touts who receive commission for their efforts. Such performances are now relatively commonplace along the South coast.

A group of my informants were even requested by an enterprising Buddhist priest to perform items from a tovil for tourists in the grounds of his temple. The

event was a fiasco and despite elaborate preparations by the performers, few tourists showed up and those that did left before the end. Performers suggested that the reason for this was that the entrance fee was too high. A further reason may have been that little attempt was made to adapt the performance to the requirements of a tourist audience; it was held late at night, it was long and run more on the lines of a conventional tovil performance.

The example to which I would like to draw attention concerns the experience of a young dancer named Siri, who lived and worked in the Galle area at the time of my fieldwork. Siri, then in his late twenties, was the product of a distinguished line of dancers and performers, many of whom were closely related to key figures in Beragoda (for example, Siri's grandfather was G.S. Saronelis [D9] on the genealogy on page 156 ).

A number of years before I got to know Siri, he had been offered the chance to dance for tourists in one of Galle's big tourist hotels. The work was relatively simple compared with his usual job as a dancer in a troupe of exorcists. A few evenings a week, Siri, accompanied by his brother-in-law, a drummer, would perform a series of dances for tourists lasting half an hour to an hour. For this performance the pair might earn over a hundred rupees which could be substantially swelled by tips and perks from the audience.

Siri currently cuts quite a figure in the Beravā



community. He dresses in fine shirts and sarongs, wears an imported gold wrist watch and, perhaps not without significance, a gold talisman (yantraya) of the type which protects against misfortune; dos and the evil eye cannot stick to gold. His presence often evokes feelings ranging from contempt to envy among his fellow kinsmen.

For Siri the choice is relatively simple. It is a choice between dancing a few steps, singing a few songs, wearing a mask or two, doing acrobatics and perhaps feigning possession, all in comfortable surroundings, on the one hand, or alternatively as an exorcist he must work for up to eighteen hours doing work which is strenuous, exhausting, demoralising and for which he may earn 50 Rs. at the most. In understandably choosing the former, whenever such a choice arises, Siri inevitably runs into conflicts within his community which run far deeper than simple jealousies.

On the occasion of a healing ritual performed for a sick kinsman, Siri was asked, quite extemporarily, to dance with the assembled troupe, a request to which he responded in good faith. Throughout his dancing I sat with a group of Siri's peers, dancers and drummers of the old school, all of whom were quietly scornful of what they saw. Siri could not follow the drummer, he did not know the closely synchronised steps (pāda) and according to those around me he just danced the same steps over and over. I was seeing a spectacular dance in which Siri

would spin round the arena like a top and somersault from one side of the arena to the other; the company I was with remained steadfastly unimpressed for what they were seeing was the rejection of all that they stood for. The subtlety, complexity and ultimately the meaning of their traditions was being erased before their very eyes.

The skills which Siri was drawing upon extended little beyond the more elementary stages of a dancer's career and, in terms of the material rewards this brought in the context of the tourist industry, he was content that this should be the case. Without ascending through the conventional hierarchy of performers, a process which takes many years, Siri had achieved material success in a relatively short space of time. The old gurunnānse, whose position and success is based on a lifetime's practice and study of the finer points of dancing and exorcism, no longer has the means to maintain ascendancy over his pupils. The hierarchy is subverted as the eyes of younger performers begin to see the measure of man not in the years of disciplined study and performance which their teachers represent, but in the rapid material success of people like Siri.

On another occasion Siri was invited to perform in a troupe organised by one of his kinsmen living near Akuressa. The ritual was to be a large Suniyam for which the patron had specifically requested that a Dahā-aṭa pāliya be included. The organiser had agreed and further

suggested that a performer of great skill and renown would be brought up from Galle for this purpose. Siri was leaned on quite heavily by the organiser to ensure his co-operation and on the night gave a splendid performance which was thoroughly appreciated by all present. After the performance, however, when it came to the question of distributing the payment received by the organiser for their performance, a dispute developed. Siri received 20 Rs. for his contribution, which was felt by him to be a snub and appropriate neither to the work he had put in nor his reputation as a performer. The organiser claimed the division to be a fair one in view of the other high ranking kinsmen who made up the troupe and went on to accuse Siri of being elevated and superior (usas kārīyek). Ultimately, Siri deferred to the more senior kinsmen, swallowing hard both anger and resentment. Afterwards he complained bitterly of the treatment he had received and stated that in future he would never perform with those particular kinsmen again. The organiser later also stated his displeasure at the events which had transpired after such a successful performance and stated furthermore that he would never ask for Siri's services again, saying in effect that he was too big for his boots!

Both examples given above illustrate the conflict which arose when the contexts of Siri's skill as a performer in tourist hotels overlapped with his position as a member of the Beravā community. His elevated position



as a result of his involvement in the former context is distinctly at odds with the perceptions of those who, in terms of age, experience, knowledge and kinship position, consider themselves more senior. Their positions, maintained and achieved through their own efforts as well as those of their predecessors, are fundamentally devalued in the face of Siri's success.

The disruption of the old order which Siri represents is given further import when it is realised that the types of presentation which find favour with tourists are also gaining in popularity with indigenous audiences. Possibly as a direct result of the attention given to certain types of performance in the tourist context, exorcists are becoming increasingly in demand as entertainers at local cultural events. The Dahā-aṭa Pāliya, for example, is often requested to be included in rituals in which it really has no place, such as the Suniyam.

On one occasion in a village near Akuressa, the Dahā-aṭa Pāliya, was actually performed in place of a Gam Maḍuva, the usual village celebration, and, according to the organisers, was a great success. This performance, however, met with considerable opposition from older and more traditionally minded elements in the village who considered it outrageous that such a ceremony be substituted for the ancient act of propitiating Pattini and the deities. The performance of the Dahā-aṭa Pāliya in this context represents an enormous shift from sacred

ceremony to secular entertainment. The shift is of a similar order to that represented by Siri's performances in the tourist hotels and ultimately signifies the re-evaluation of important aspects of the Sinhalese cultural Tradition.

#### 8.6 Masks and mask-making

Masks figure in a wide range of rituals and ceremonies and are used to image various deities and demons in the course of dramatic performances. In the major religious processions (pārahāra) masked dances appear as part of a pageant of Buddhist cosmology. Many different types of masks appear in such processions, but perhaps the most important are the rākṣa masks which represent the ferocious mythological beings which are believed to have inhabited Sri Lanka before the coming of Buddhism.[2] Masks further figure in folk dramas such as Kōlam and Sokari[3] as well as in dramatic interludes in village ceremonies such as the Gam Maḍuva and Dēvol Maḍuva. Finally, as we have seen in Appendix I (page 488), masking plays an integral part in the process of exorcism, during which masked actors take on a number of demonic forms. The numerous masks used in this context range from the terrifying visage of Mahā Sohōna, the Great Cemetery demon, to the comical portrayal of illness as the various Sanni demons.

Masks form part of a performative continuum, in which

dance, costume and overall context fuse together to articulate particular sentiments and ideas to an audience.

In the same way that masks form part of an integrated performance, so their production is also part of a wider system of production. In the traditional context those who use masks are also able to carve them. Dancers develop a special relationship with their masks, which may have been passed on over several generations. They also have to know how to use the masks according to certain conventions of dance and movement which enable the dancer to animate the character depicted in the mask. In many instances mask-carving is one of a number of skills which comprise the dancer's overall skill and ability.

As well as general abilities in mask production among individual performers there are also particular traditions of mask-making which have identified particular families with this skill. In such cases masks are produced upon request for kinsmen but rarely for sale to outsiders. One man said that whenever someone outside of the caste asked to purchase his masks he would automatically place extortionate and prohibitive prices on his works.

In the traditional context of mask production, then, masks are made infrequently, to sell or give to fellow performers and kinsmen. Production, ownership, meaning and context of application are all closely inter-related.

In the sale of masks to tourists, however, the close identification between meaning and context is almost



totally absent. Masks are produced and presented for sale in a way which could hardly be more discontinuous with their ritual significance. Contextual detail is often absent from such masks as it serves no purpose in the tourist context. Tourists have little conception of what the masks ought to be, they can only respond to what they appear to be: kitsch, enchanting, hideous, unusual, a serious attempt to market folk-arts or else a rip-off of gullible foreigners.

In producing for the tourist market the producers of masks are to a great extent liberated from the traditional parameters set by performers and performance. For example, masks no longer need to be worn, which means they can be of any size: gargantuan masks of three to four feet high, or miniatures of only a few inches sold by the thousand. Actual mythological specifications, previously recorded in ancient texts and transmitted orally, are no longer of primary importance; colour, dimension, motif and decoration all become to a large degree arbitrary as the imagination of the sculptor is faced with the task of making masks which will sell.

Liberation from traditional context in the interest of the tourist market is perhaps nowhere more clearly seen than in the rise to prominence of the rākṣa mask in recent years. In tourist shops the length and breadth of Sri Lanka one can find the bulging eyed demons with heads wrapped in serpents or flames. Not only masks, however,

but vases, key fobs and batiks all bear the striking emblem. Postcards and tourist brochures, similarly have adopted this particular image; 'the devil dance mask'.

The rise in popularity of this particular category of mask for the tourist is no doubt linked to the rising demand for tourist souvenirs - 'holy grails' as Nelson Graburn has called them - on the one hand, and exhaustion of genuine supplies of masks on the other. For many years dealers have systematically trawled rural areas buying up old masks for sale to higher class dealers in the international market, with the result that, nowadays, old masks are quite rare.

However, there are other factors which must be taken into consideration in accounting for the popularity of this particular mask. Graburn (1976:27) has spoken of 'borrowed identities', the adoption by one group of the symbols of another for purposes of public identity or national ethnicity. With respect to tourist arts in general Graburn illustrates this process quite strikingly:

'A recent survey of the contents of various ethnic art stores and United Nations gift shops shows that these processes of borrowing the identity of minority peoples - perhaps at the very same time as repressing other aspects of their cultures - is international. Nations choose obscure but exotic cultural features to present as their ethnic markers to others. In a quick look at the dolls for sale, it was noted, for example, that Canada presented dolls made by the Eskimo and Cree Indians; the United States, Iroquois dolls and kachinas; Thailand, dolls made by its Karen minority; Russia, dolls made by Siberians and Eskimos; Panama, Cuna dolls;

Nigeria, dolls made by Ibibo; Norway, dolls made by the Lapps; and Guatemala, Brazil and Peru, dolls made by former and disappearing Indian groups, and so on.'

(op cit:29)

The process to which Graburn refers is one with which we, as anthropologists, are quite familiar; it is a process of cultural dislocation similar to that encountered in the field. Culture is everywhere but with the informant sitting opposite, who, although quite happy to direct one to where it can be found, is unable to make his or her own objective statements. Questions concerning present day practices are re-directed to elderly and retired exponents, questions of kinship evoke citations of ideals and anomalies, rarely will an informant be able to articulate the way relations are lived out in practice: in short, the difference is one between practice and discourse about practice (Bourdieu 1977:16).

Similarly, when it comes to presenting Culture to an international audience, attention is directed, not to the centre, but to the periphery, where symbols and values are more easily detached and manipulated. Through various acts of national projection, Culture is located for ease of presentation among those who, for whatever reason, are most loosely integrated into the dominant structures of the society.

In terms of minority groups Sri Lanka has its aboriginal and highly anomalous Veddah population, the reputed remnants of a pre-Buddhist hunter-gatherer



population, hailed as living relics and, for a fee, not averse to acting as such. Belying the novelty of the Veddah as a vestige of an earlier society, however, is the crucial issue of land rights, and their confrontation with the government over the ownership of certain areas.

Through a more subtle process of protection, 'devil dances', rākṣa masks and the like, and consequently the groups associated with their production, have provided Sri Lanka with something of a 'borrowed identity'. It is not the everyday and the mundane to which tourists are exposed but the extreme and exceptional. Tourists are confronted with what the Sinhalese think their culture to be. Groups like the Beravā and the imagery they purvey are peculiarly apt to fulfil this role of culture objectified. On the one hand because of their marginality within Sinhalese society, and on the other because of the ambivalence with which their activities are viewed by a progressive middle-class. Exorcism ceremonies and all that they stand for are still viewed with repugnance and embarrassment by many; a childish tendency in an adolescent nation. Yet the images which arise from this form represent Tradition and antiquity and hence authenticity and individuality.

When recently a Sinhalese couple came to live and study in Durham I was fascinated to note that among the few non-functional possessions they had brought was a picture of the Buddha and a pair of badly crafted 'devil

dance' masks. The masks were to remind them of home, yet, whenever I talked with my friends about the Beravā they expressed little short of incredulity at my interest in such a group. A similar contradiction can be seen closer to home in the present penchant for horse brasses and gypsy caravans in urban living rooms. The Romany idyll to which these images point, however, is fundamentally at odds with popular attitudes towards gypsies in the present day.

The 'devil dance' and its assorted regalia would appear to provide a very suitable cultural distillate, commercially acceptable to the Sinhalese on the one hand and experientially acceptable to the tourists on the other. Culture is located - or dis-located - at a distance, separated off from the more centrally held Sinhala Buddhist ideology and hence more easily manipulated for commercial interests.

In the next section I give an account of the development of a mask-producing venture which plots the movement of one family of traditional specialists into the tourist trade in quite a substantial way.

#### 8.7 The Gamunu mask factory

The example developed in this section concerns the experience of K.G. Sedaran (D1) and his family. Sedaran, now in his early sixties, grew up in Beragoda in the midst of an impressive network of specialists and performers.

His father and grandfather were both exorcists of some renown and their marriages connected them with key lines of performers in the Beragoda community (see Figure 2, page 156). Sedaran's line, in addition to their skills in exorcism, had also acquired a strong reputation as mask-carvers. For three generations at least, Sedaran's family had been providing masks to performers in and around Beragoda. Today, Sedaran still produces masks for sale, or as gifts, to his kinsmen.

In his youth Sedaran learned from his father and grandfather many skills which, in addition to mask-carving, included dancing, drumming and the making of drums. It was from drumming that he earned his livelihood and during his lifetime had been quite a powerful organiser of temple drumming services in the Beragoda area. For most of his earlier life, however, mask making had been an incidental activity, a composite part of the skills which he contributed to the overall division of labour within his community.

The development of his mask making business and the supply of masks to purchasers outside of the relatively narrow context within the caste, dates back just over fifteen years. At that time Sedaran, assisted by two of his sons, began supplying masks to the government handicrafts emporium, Laksala. At that time, tourism was not taken seriously at a government level and, by comparison with today, the distribution and export of



goods remained relatively unorganised. Sedaran's family derived supplementary income from the sale of their 'devil dance' masks on a fixed price basis to Laksala. The bulk of their income, however, was still derived from the provision of their caste-specific services.

In the early seventies the growing tourist presence brought increased awareness of the market potential and the growth of private sector interest. Mask-factories began to spring up along the west coast which could supply cheaper masks in quantity. Sedaran claimed that their more authentic style of mask production could not compete with the production line techniques of the coastal factories, and consequently the Laksala outlet was lost. Sedaran's masks were too expensive and of too high a standard.

After breaking with Laksala, however, Sedaran was able to secure another outlet for his goods in nearby Galle. A tourist entrepreneur, dealing in gems, batiks, jewellery and fancy goods, agreed to buy Sedaran's work on a regular basis and would pay better prices for the quality of his work. Once a week one of Sedaran's sons would cycle into Galle with the week's production on the back of his bicycle. Income became steady and substantial relative to what it had been previously.

The cottage mask industry which emerged from this access to the tourist trade was conducted by Sedaran and three of his sons, who each contributed to the running of

the enterprise.[4] None were given access to the skills of their father or grandfather, but each was taught how to carve and paint masks. Even Sedaran's only daughter joined in by helping with the painting of masks.

As the energies of the family went increasingly into their mask business, the way in which the family earned their living underwent a gradual transformation. The production of masks for outside sale developed from a peripheral to a central activity and the provision of services within the caste, itself became a dispensable aspect of their work. The changes in method and purpose of production, as in the case of Siri the dancer, precipitated a number of conflicts within the wider community.

By the time I left the area, Sedaran and family were working in virtual isolation from the rest of the community. Their livelihood no longer depended on their co-operation and interaction with other members of the community. In effect the range of relations necessary for subsistence had contracted from the community to the family. The repeated production of a single item by one family unit did not contribute to the community-wide division of labour and ultimately contradicted the tight internal community structure based on exchange, alliance and co-operation. Whereas before, the viability of any particular tradition was only realised through a division of labour geared to corporate acts of production and

performance, now the viability of tradition potentially existed within the family. Sedaran was no longer obliged, as he was at one time, and as were his father and grandfather, to respond to the powerful pull which draws the community and its members together through kinship and co-operation in work.

A further consequence of the change in mode of livelihood could be seen in the material wealth which Sedaran's family acquired. The style of production in which the family now engaged enabled accumulation to take place on a large scale. Few other activities carried out within the traditional compass could be so effectively transposed for production in such a lucrative market.

In the normal course of events performers are paid relatively small amounts for their services and even the most basic of securities may take many years to accrue. Performers of different categories rely on one another to secure an income and under such circumstances jealousy and the evil eye operate against the emergence of large discrepancies in material wealth. Where such discrepancies did exist they were legitimised by reputation and excellence and expressed through the hierarchies which existed within the community. The new context of mask production, as with that of dance, provides the potential to circumvent this tightly knit structure of relationships.

The long term consequences of the changes which are



taking place are difficult to assess. Shortly after I left Sri Lanka, however, Sedaran's family embarked on another stage of their trajectory out of the traditional context of production. Towards the end of 1980 I received word from one of Sedaran's sons that they had succeeded in opening their own mask factory near the beach resort of Koggala on the South coast. 'The Gamunu Mask Factory' (named after the eldest son), a small shop in which tourists could watch masks being made and purchase them direct, effectively eliminated the entrepreneur and enabled Sedaran to go direct to the public with his product. In business terms the venture was likely to be a considerable success and represents a major achievement in view of the general social discrimination suffered by the Beravā in the past.

#### 8.8 Sedaran's house warming ceremony

The changes which I have described in the previous section are fundamentally in conflict with the normative structure of the Berava community as described in earlier chapters. Such conflicts are rarely left latent and towards the end of my stay in Sri Lanka I was fortunate enough to attend a ritual event at which many of the tensions and conflicts which Sedaran's changing circumstances had induced were publicly aired.

The event in question was a house warming ceremony (gēvādīma mangala utsavaya) in the form of a pirit

ceremony. Buddhist monks were to be invited to the house. They would sit inside the house for the entire night chanting scriptures in order that blessings be conferred upon it, its environs and all those present at the ceremony.

There was nothing unusual about the holding of a pirit ceremony for the inauguration of a new building. It was, in many ways, a pirit like all others. A party of monks were escorted from the nearby temple, the procession was headed by a drummer, following behind was a baldachin held aloft by four of Sedaran's close kinsmen, and under the baldachin was one of Sedaran's sons holding the relic casket (dhātu karanduva) wrapped in white cloth upon his head. Upon arrival at the house the monks were welcomed and their feet ceremoniously washed, after which each priest was escorted into the house. Inside the house they were given light refreshments and gifts of new robes. Formalities over, the priests entered the specially constructed pavilion (mandapam) in which the chanting of pirit takes place. A bottle of water (pirit pān), the texts to be chanted (pirit pota) and the relic casket were placed on the table in the mandapam. Before the priests embarked upon their recitations, a reel of thread (pirit nūla) was unwound from the mandapam around all the assembled members of the audience.

Had I witnessed this ceremony at the beginning of my

stay in the area, rather than at the end, I no doubt would have observed and recorded a pirit ceremony for the inauguration of a new building. As it happened at the end of my stay, however, the ceremony acquired a much more profound significance with respect to the circumstances of those involved. Many of the participants were well-known to me and my presence at the ritual was not merely as a casual observer, but as a member of their community. From this perspective the event took on a crucially indexical aspect. As with the events described in Chapter 4 (Section 5, page 227), the ritual focus was linked intimately with the status interests of the participants. The form of the ritual, a pirit, served as a vehicle with which to make a number of complex statements about identity, social role and social mobility.

In this respect the pirit ceremony was as much an act of social creativity and experimentation as it was an act of communication and the affirmation of accepted values, echoing somewhat Leach's famous statement that myth and ritual is a language of argument, not a chorus of harmony. As a durable cultural form, reproducible in different times and places by different people, the pirit provided a crucible or container into which a whole series of variables could be introduced and held up for evaluation.

'In ritual, as in art, he who devises or creates or performs is also spectator of what he does; and he who beholds it is



also active in the sense that he interprets the performance. The value of ritual lies partly in this ambiguity of the active and passive for creator, performer and beholder: the sense of an arena of constraints within which the individual is free to some extent to search out, interpret and discover implies an indeterminacy about the full significance of what is done which is not to be taken necessarily as a defect in communication.'

(Lewis 1980:38)

Let us now look at the ways in which the pirit as an accepted cultural form was used by Sedaran as a device to express objectively change and conflict.

The ceremony, although a house-warming ceremony, was not in fact for the inauguration of a new house. The house in which Sedaran lived had been standing for many years. What was new, however, was an extension built at the side of the existing house, consisting of two small rooms, which were to be used as a kitchen (previously a cadjan lean-to) and a bedroom. This in itself was not so unusual but there was an immediate discrepancy between the nature of the building and the scale of the celebration which was conducted.

The ceremony held turned out to be an exercise par excellence in conspicuous consumption; no expense was spared in the execution of the event. Food for the guests was both extensive and of the best quality, a generator was hired and the house bedecked with flashing lights. Hired speakers blared pop-music in the early evening and later broadcast the pirit chanting over the whole

neighbourhood. Corrugated sheets and chairs were hired for the shelter and comfort of the guests.

Over five hundred printed invitations were said to have been distributed in the weeks leading up to the event. What was important, however, was not so much the number of invitations distributed but to whom they were given. Unlike other celebrations put on by members of the caste this event was not to be a celebration of community and the internal structure of the caste. On the contrary, most of the guests were from other castes, and predominantly Goyigama. They included many of the key figures in the rural Sinhala Buddhist community: the local bourgeoisie, shop-keepers, farmers, teachers, and J.P.'s. Of the Beravā community only essential kinsmen were invited such as brothers and close affines. The guest list was highly selective in its choice of Beravā brethren and many felt snubbed because they were not invited. The orientation of the event was markedly centrifugal rather than centripetal; it was an attempt to make a statement to the society without rather than the community within.

In seeking to make a statement to the society beyond his immediate community, Sedaran was attempting to dispel publicly the image, real or imagined, of the Beravā as impoverished, low-caste exponents of the 'despised arts'. Through a massive act of hospitality he sought to impress his guests. In order for this to be successful there could be no short-comings and no room for criticism; it

had to equal, if not better, anything that any of the guests could do.

That the form used to make this statement was a pirit was of itself significant. The pirit ceremony is a highly respectable and adaptable form of Buddhist ceremony. Its performance is meritorious to all involved and achieves a more immediate magical potency through the recitation of sacred texts and the presence of the priests. The ceremony can be performed by laymen (gihi pirit) or by priests, but the latter is by far the more efficacious.

Prior to the occasion discussed above, only once did I see a pirit ceremony performed within a Beravā community. This ceremony was a gihi pirit performed by a group of men from Beragoda to protect and fortify a pregnant kinswoman. The family involved did not invite a group of priests to perform the ceremony because it was said that they could not afford it. Such a statement was only slightly less effacing than the one put forward by one or two more cynical informants who said that priests would not officiate at Beravā houses on the grounds of caste.

For Sedaran it was thus an honour to have, not only a full company of priests present at the ceremony, but some quite high ranking and famous ones too. Their very presence provided considerable public legitimation for the whole event. The priests, however, did not come cheaply.



Unlike many of the events described earlier in which the fees of the Beravā remain more or less the same regardless of the patron's expenditure, on this occasion the expenditure rose in accordance with the size of the event. They were treated with lavish hospitality, each given a brown paper parcel containing new robes and an undisclosed but substantial donation was made to the temple.

The bringing together of the spheres of caste and priesthood, however, was not complete; that they were officiating at the house of low-caste people could not be overlooked completely.

Upon arrival at the house where pirit is to be chanted, it is customary for the head of the household to wash the feet of the priests before they enter. On this occasion the task of washing the feet of the priests was given over to a man of the washerman caste who was a close friend of the family.

Later in the evening one of the priests offered his vote of thanks over the microphone. He expressed his gratitude and spoke in glowing terms of the treatment that the priests had received from their 'Beravā' hosts. The use of the word 'Beravā' on this occasion came like a bombshell to the assembled guests and particularly those of the Beravā caste. The term Beravā is strictly a term of reference and if used as a term of address carries derogatory overtones to say the least. It would have been more appropriate to address the hosts as being of the

Nākat Kūliya, the accepted term of address, or perhaps safest to leave out allusion to caste altogether. While the vote of thanks was being delivered I was sitting with a group of Beravā men. With startled indignation one of them turned to the others and said that despite the marvellous treatment the priests had received they still called them 'Beravā'. Another more earthy participant in the discussion which ensued, rather cuttingly asked what the priests were expected to call them? All present knew the social reality involved and despite attempts to conceal it or transcend it in the ceremony, this reality had inevitably surfaced.

A further dampener on the occasion came as many of the non-Beravā guests began to leave the ritual. Although they had arrived in droves in the early evening, as much out of curiosity as courtesy, many were visibly uneasy on such new social territory. Many accepted tea and refreshment, a cigarette or a chew of betel, but all declined to partake of the sumptuous spread which waited to be consumed. The unspoken rules of caste commensality were politely but firmly upheld. By 10.00 p.m. the tumult had died down, a large number of guests had attended, paid their respects and departed. Sedaran was delighted at the attendance but visibly disappointed when the rate at which the guests were leaving began to exceed the rate at which they were arriving. For the rest of the night the ritual was attended by a small core of Sedaran's close kinsmen.

As an exercise in the translation of wealth into status the event inevitably floundered and Sedaran failed to place himself on a map which charted social territories outside of his own caste community. However, there were a number of ways in which the ceremony did assert a new or emergent identity for the family of mask makers. This could be seen primarily in the focus of the pirit, the pirit mandapam erected for the ceremony in which the priests were to sit.

#### 8.9 Masking relations of dominance

Normally, priests chant pirit from inside a pavilion-like structure, of temporary or permanent construction, which has eight sides. Obviously, for the chanting of domestic pirit the structure has to be temporary and can rarely be of eight sides given the limitations on space in most Sinhalese homes. Where space is at a premium, an entrance and perhaps two walls are built across a corner, giving the impression of a larger structure. For the chanting of domestic pirit, the mandapam is typically constructed from light timber and decorated with flattened banana leaves, young coconut leaves and paper doilies. Inside is placed a table around which the priests sit for their night-long recitations. The space which the mandapam describes and the symbols with which it is filled render it a highly charged and auspicious centre.



The mandapam constructed on this occasion was similar to the one described above; where it differed radically from others was in its decoration. The whole structure was adorned from top to bottom with rows and rows of 'devil dance' masks of the rākṣa type sold to tourists. They ranged from small ones just a few inches high to a full size rākṣa mask with flashing red light-bulbs for eyes which hung over the entrance to the mandapam (see Plate XVI).

All present agreed that they had never seen anything like it before and Sedaran spoke proudly of the originality of their idea. However, while acknowledging its originality, both the audience and the priests voiced deep reservations about the appropriateness of the decoration.

Was it proper that the priests, the agents of dhamma, the Buddha's teaching, should sit within a structure decorated with the mythological adversaries of Buddhism? Had the occasion been conducted on any lesser scale, I feel sure the priests would have refused to enter the structure. As it was, the momentum of the event carried them through.

The reservations of those attending the event, and particularly the priests, are hardly surprising in view of the mythological associations rākṣa and yakṣa have in Buddhism. Gombrich (1971:204) tells us:

'There is frequent reference in the canon





Plate XVI. Sedaran's Pirit Mandapam.



to monks being disturbed in forest solitude by troublesome yakṣa.'

Throughout mythology the rākṣa and yakṣa are the agents of all that is antithetical to Buddhism. In their multiple manifestations they represent the forces of malevolence, unbridled passion and avarice, and impurity incarnate. As we have seen earlier in the thesis many of the rituals performed by the Beravā deal with the malign effects of demons and seek to relocate them in their rightful place in the cosmic order; that is at the bottom, subservient to gods and to the Buddha. In effecting this re-ordering the Beravā also acquire many of the attributes of the demons; they too are ultimately re-located at the bottom of the hierarchy. Thus, in the ceremony, Sedaran had succeeded in bringing together a number of contextually distinct domains within a single event.

In social terms, the event clearly succeeded in bringing together low caste and high caste on common ground. This in itself was not so unusual, but the crucial factor in this instance was the legitimation which the monks gave to the event by their co-operation, even though this was not total. Nevertheless, the event, as an inter-caste exercise in social relations was given a strong stamp of approval by their participation as officiants at a low-caste house.

In ideological terms, this blending of contexts is taken even further. Buddhism, represented by the priests and the pirit chanting is physically enclosed by the



demons which signify the domain of specialisation of the Beravā. The positive interior inhabited by high caste Buddhist priests is surrounded by Beravā produced artefacts which represent the negative forces which continually threaten to overwhelm the power of the centre.

The consequences of this juxtaposition can be seen on a number of levels and suggest the enormous creative potential which ritual has as a fundamentally practical means to demonstrate both order and the contradictions which people experience in actually living out that order.

Thus, in the context of the pirit ceremony we can see how at one level the intentions behind the ceremony were entirely consistent with a business ethic espoused by Buddhism. The pirit ceremony can be held for a number of reasons other than house warming and one of these purposes is the legitimation and blessing of a business venture. For this reason, the form the ritual took was quite acceptable. The business of mask-making for the tourist industry was entering a new phase of growth and being good Buddhists it was only right that Sedaran and his family should translate some of their good fortune into merit (pin) for themselves and those in attendance. Furthermore, the ceremony would ensure that the future of the enterprise would be blessed with good-fortune, which, with the opening of their mask factory, it evidently was. In this respect one of Sedaran's sons told me that each of the masks hung on the mandapam would absorb the

auspicious benefits arising from the pirit chanting. They would thus become lucky or good (sūba), and consequently sell quickly and profitably.

On another level, however, the ceremony and the form it took acquired a more profound significance and sought to expose the injustice and paradox of caste prejudice against a family who in all but caste terms were equal if not better than many of their higher caste neighbours and associates. They had a successful business, they regularly dealt with foreigners, their house had been made more substantial and now they had been able to afford a pirit ceremony which was second to none.

In order to understand the manner in which this paradox was brought out in the ritual and how those putting on the ritual sought to resolve it, it is necessary to look more closely at the significance of pirit in Buddhist thought. Gombrich states that:

'The canonical explanation of pirit is that it converts and mollifies the yakku.'  
(op cit:205)

By the power of the Buddha and His teachings, the disruptive forces of the demons are brought under control. Just as in the story of the Liccavi Kings, it was the Buddha's presence and his recitation of the Ratana Sutta which led to the expulsion and pacification of the demons, so, with pirit it is the chanting of Holy words from the Buddha's teaching (Dhamma) by priests which, on each occasion it is performed thereafter, succeeds in pacifying

the demons and all that they represent. One might even conclude that the mandapam adorned with devil masks is a more accurate, and certainly more graphic, representation of what the pirit ceremony wishes to convey: that is, priests beset by troublesome demons whom, by the power of their knowledge of Dhamma and their extreme virtue, they are able to overcome.

As in the original mythological conception of the ritual, I would suggest that the demons which adorn the mandapam are also being 'mollified and converted'. Like the demons in mythology they are also assimilated into a system from which they were previously excluded. Metaphorically, the masks, like the beings they portray, become socialised. They are separated off from their original context and transformed into a more respectable one, that is for sale to tourists. The act of production which previously located those associated and identified with it in such a lowly social niche, is held up for re-evaluation. The manner in which the event is orchestrated offers the possibility of an implicit contextual transformation. The context of production is brought into line with the context of consumption and this is legitimated through publicly accepted and publicly witnessed Buddhist channels. Masks which were once associated with the inauspicious, at the end of the ceremony, are made auspicious; they are lucky and will sell quickly and profitably to tourists. A tradition is



transformed into a commodity, or rather a means to the production of commodities.

The domestication of demons, which for many Beravā constitutes their daily work, however, is not quite the end point in the ritual in question which goes one stage further in emptying the masks of almost their entire contextual meaning. In making masks for tourists all the traditional specifications of masks are rendered redundant: potent symbols become empty signs.

A crucial aspect of this transformation is to be found in the manner in which masks are produced for the tourist market. In response to the demand for trinkets and souvenirs, identical items are produced ad nauseam for cash sale. The changes which this style of production engenders are not dissimilar to those described by Walter Benjamin[5] in the context of the mechanical reproduction of art works in the west. The decay of the 'aura' and the loss of authority of the artefacts, both emerge as a result of repeated reproduction. The uniqueness in time, space and substantive duration of masks fashioned under traditional conditions and restraints is eliminated. The 'aura' they have by virtue of the individuality of producer and consumer is lost as the quality of production is displaced by quantity. Artefacts are torn from their embeddedness in the traditional context of production; there is a loss of concentricity and a move towards 'a sense of the universal equality of all things' (Benjamin

1970:223). Masks, thus produced, are no longer symbols which put people in touch with the malevolence inherent in the lower orders of the cosmos; they are necessarily emptied of such meanings to become mere decoration suitable for consumption by a non-indigenous audience. The masks need only be colourful, exotic, cheap and suitable typifications of the primitive. By placing the masks on the mandapam this transformation was affirmed and demonstrated. Using paradigms clearly and repeatedly presented in Buddhist thought and ritual, Sedaran's pirit attempted to de-contextualise the act of mask production and the artefacts he had produced: Sedaran wished to become accepted as a producer with goods to sell and wished his masks to become artefacts for sale like any others.

Inevitably, such intentions had brought Sedaran and those around him into contention with his own community. While he was endeavouring to dispel, cast out and leave behind certain associations and prejudices, there were still those in his community who, for good or ill, still depended on their traditional identity in their work. Similarly, by rejecting, to a large extent, the dense web of intra-caste ties and obligations he called into question the fundamental structures which give his community cohesion and identity through time.

In effect, Sedaran created his own rite de passage in which he sought to bring about a shift in the

perception and evaluation of his family's role and status. He was asserting the respectability of masks and the craft of mask making in the context of tourist production. To those who attended the ceremony, Sedaran and family were no longer demon priests, shabby drummers or devious exponents of the despised arts who inspire horror and revulsion by their very proximity. On the contrary, they were a respectable and moderately successful family of entrepreneurs, enjoying considerable material benefits from a business venture in the tourist trade.

One of the more direct expressions of the upward social mobility which the ceremony sought to demonstrate was the change of name undertaken by the household of Sedaran shortly after the ceremony. They ceased to use the traditional format of initials followed by birth name and adopted a new name, used like a western surname. they became 'Gamunu-ratna': Gamunu being the name of the eldest son and the name given to their mask making business and the suffix -ratna being a common Sinhalese name ending meaning 'jewel'. This suffix, incidently, is a typical ending of many high-caste surnames. K.G. Sedaran thus became Sedaran Gamunuratna and his sons also adopted this contrived and caste-anonymous surname.

#### Notes to Chapter 8

[1] In 1965, J.R. Jayawardena, who was then Minister for



Tourism, said that he would freeze the number of tourists who came to the island to 150,000 or 200,000 but felt that it was unlikely that this figure would be reached for a very long time. When he came to office as President in 1977, the figure was 153,665 and it was estimated that this figure would rise to half a million by 1984.

[2] The masks generally depict four main categories of rākṣa: the fire or gini rākṣa, typically red and yellow and adorned with flames; the snake or nāga rākṣa, decorated with snakes; the hawk or gurulu rākṣa which is usually yellow and green and displays the face of gurulu the mythical hawk, and finally the peacock or mayura rākṣa which is decorated in the manner of a peacock. There are many other such named rākṣa but these seem to be of greater obscurity.

[3] Accounts of Kōlam can be found in Pertold (1973:63-69), Saraccandra (1966:59-83) and Raghavan (1962:110-119) and Sokari in Saraccandra (op cit:84-94).

[4] Sedaran's eldest son, Gamunu, had moved away from Beragoda before the mask business had fully got under way. Gamunu was a skilled temple artist and had passed some of his expertise as a painter to his younger brothers in the art of mask painting.

[5] "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by Walter Benjamin (1970).

## CONCLUSION

My main aim throughout this thesis has been to present a comprehensive body of ethnographic data concerning the lives and work of a body of ritual specialists. The specific area of study was initially defined in terms of caste: my informants were all of the Beravā caste and my ethnography attempted to provide both an historical as well as a contemporary perspective upon their caste-specific occupations and identity. Within the parameters set by caste and inter-caste relations my work developed along two broad themes, namely tradition and performance, both of which are central to the lives of practising ritual specialists.

In Chapter 1 an account was given of the Beravā as a social category within the wider system of categories which constitute the Sinhalese caste system, it was suggested that the low status and negative perception of the Beravā within the Sinhalese system might be accounted for, not in terms of inherent properties of purity and

pollution, but in terms of the associations and consequences of their hereditary occupations. The negative perception of the Beravā is essentially a moral judgement passed upon the Beravā in view of the actions they participate in, or are assumed to participate in. It was suggested that a recurrent and unifying theme throughout the many activities of the Beravā is that of dos, meaning literally fault or flaw, a potential blot on an otherwise untarnished reality. The idea of dos, its location, removal, transference and disposal, has been seen to figure in most of the ritual activities in which the Beravā engage. Dos arises as a consequence of bad action and can invite negative attention from a variety of supernatural agents. It is the task of the Beravā in the various services they provide to anticipate, remove or absorb these consequences by placing themselves and their own highly ordered actions at the heart of disorder. In so doing, the performers of ritual, the makers of images and the builders of houses must suffer the moral consequences of their own actions as well as taking upon themselves the consequences of other peoples' action.

This process was clearly demonstrated in the analysis of the Bali Tovil developed throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in which the efforts of the Bali specialists are aimed at relieving the patient of dos, accumulated as a result of bad action, both intentional and unintentional in the



round of day to day affairs. During a bad planetary period it is the accumulated dos which threatens to have catastrophic consequences in the life of the patient. The ritual attempts to remove the dos from the afflicted person through a sustained subjection to moral and physical cleansing. Furthermore, it was suggested that through the act of offering, the ritual generally seeks to prolong the life of the patient by creating the possibility of a future time.

If the general argument put forward above is correct with respect to action, particularly as it is related to occupation and its moral consequences, then it might be possible to develop a more comprehensive theory of Sinhalese caste than has hitherto been put forward. Rather than being something of an anomalous variant of the Indian caste system it might be possible to account for contemporary caste and the persistence of inter-caste attitudes within wider Buddhist notions of action and its consequences. In particular, ideas concerning karma, occupation, and morality might be usefully brought together in a synthesis which would tell us why artisan castes are considered low and Buddhist priests do not dance!

Having delimited my field in terms of caste in Chapter 1 and in terms of community in Chapter 2, in Chapter 3 I turned to the question of 'Tradition' in an attempt to further delimit the field in terms of the domain of caste-

specific activities, which were my main concern. In discussing the concept of 'Tradition' it was necessary to distinguish two related but distinct uses of the concept and to establish clearly the application of these concepts in the context of the Beravā and their ritual works. On the one hand I distinguish the concept of Tradition, a general notion referring to a body of received knowledge which is identified in part with the caste but more generally with the wider domain of beliefs and practices relating to the lower orders of the cosmos. In this sense Tradition is taken to be transcendent. Alternatively, the notion of traditions was developed. The term traditions refers more specifically to the actual chains of transmission along which certain items of knowledge and skill are passed, corresponding closely to the indigenous notion of paramparāva or pedigree. By focussing on the nature of traditions and the process by which they are transmitted it was possible to demonstrate the ways in which knowledge and skills have profound significance in the lives of ritual specialists and artisans. Central to this analysis was the suggestion that, in the relative absence of formal property among the Beravā, particularly land, traditions function as a form of property, fulfilling a similar ideological role to more conventional forms of property. They are a resource to which access has to be controlled and regulated and they provide the means to livelihood for those who come to possess them.

It was thus possible to investigate the systems of relationship and strategies through which traditions are constructed and mobilised within the community. In particular, traditions were related to questions of personal prestige and status and shown to enter into relations of kinship and marriage, as would any other form of property. Indeed, those with access to and control over long and powerful traditions were seen to operate as if they were propertied in the conventional sense, that is they reproduced strategies which tended towards agnation and the strong identity of the patriline.

'Tradition' then is not something that stretches out into the past but is constantly re-evaluated and re-figured in the present. Since traditions are used as a component in the structure of contemporary social relations there is a process of continually re-inscribing the past. 'Tradition' does not tumble down from the past at the whim of external changes, but, because it is comprised of traditions which are integral to the lives of its exponents, it is subject to its own deliberate continuity and mechanisms of persistence. Those given access to the resources which their past provides, and thus in a position to make decisions concerning their transmission into the future, exert a powerful influence, not only on the content of their heritage but also on its form. Ideologically, traditions are believed to remain constant in their transmission; like material artefacts



they may become aged and worn in, their passage from generation to generation, but in essence they remain the same (and in the context of traditions it is ideologically fundamental that this should be the case). Beneath the level of appearances however, traditions are continually and creatively changing as they are adapted to meet and even anticipate wider social and cultural changes both internal and external to the caste.

To speak of traditions in this way takes us to the heart of the process of cultural reproduction and the basic structures which make this possible. For example, in the production of cultural performances par excellence in the form of healing rituals, it was possible to demonstrate in Chapter 4 the patterns which underlie the formation of troupes and the concomitant bringing together of diverse traditions which make these spectacular performances possible. The mobilisation of individual knowledge and skills for the production of a coherent, effective and ultimately persuasive healing ritual is effected primarily through kinship networks which are criss-crossed by ties of apprenticeship, inter-marriage and co-operation over many generations between the performers. These social ties give the troupes thus formed a tight but highly flexible solidarity.

The translation or transformation of various individualised traditions into coherent, corporate,

cultural performances at the ideational level follows a pattern akin to 'Levi-Strauss' notion of bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966:16) with the Beravā as bricoleurs, intellectual odd-job men, continually re-organising their 'heterogeneous repertoire' of fragments of knowledge and skill to meet whatever task they have to hand. Whether the task be to ease the stresses of child-bearing, bolster a flagging ego or bring to 'life' an image of Buddha, the resultant bricolage is always a reconstruction using the same materials: 'it is always earlier ends which are called upon to play the part of means' (op cit:21).

However, in creating their elaborate cultural performances the Beravā are doing far more than just re-organising fragments in a cultural kaleidoscope; their performances create and demonstrate meaning or rather the possibility that things might mean something. With each ordered and carefully executed ritual performance, a cogent statement is being made against indeterminacy in the lives of men and women. The indeterminate is classified, named, made explicit, and acted upon. The elaboration and ordering of cultural codes and values in the total act of performance provides a potent means to create distance between 'the private emotions of the actors and their commitment to a public morality' (Tambiah 1981:124). Public and private are brought into a state of alignment as ritual performance demonstrates a collective connection for all those who participate: it provides an

external symbolic template for inner subjective experience, and offers the possibility of re-organising the latter in terms of the former.

In focussing in detail upon the Bali Tovil in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, it was my aim to demonstrate how, in ritual performance, this process is potentially achieved. Chapter 5 provided the background to the Bali Tovil ritual complex in terms of its constituent elements such as the beliefs, myths and ideas which underlie this category of rituals in general. In Chapter 6 an illustration of the type of event which the performance of a Bali Tovil creates was given, with the emphasis on the particularity, uniqueness, and indeed originality, of each realisation. In Chapter 7 I undertook an analysis of the data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 with the aim of illuminating the logic of the Bali Tovil as a healing ritual with curative transformation as its expressed intent, as well as demonstrating some more general inferences about the nature of ritual performance and its power to influence and persuade its participants of specific outcomes.

The approach followed in the analysis was influenced considerably by Tambiah's call for a 'performative approach' to ritual (1981). Tambiah suggests that we should see ritual as performative in at least three senses: Austinian, that is, to say something is also to do something; Dramatic, ritual is a staged performance and finally: Indexical, the performance of ritual is directly



linked to the status and power interests of its participants. Within a broadly interpretative framework each of these three aspects of ritual performance were separated out in the context of the Bali Tovil in order to demonstrate how such an event achieves its total performative effect.

As in any hermeneutic enterprise the act of interpretation is intrinsically incomplete and at this point in my thesis I found myself dismayed yet excited that, having opened one door, there were many more that waited to be opened. Musical structure, dramatic effect, the nature of symbols, the semantics of space and many more/areas had been touched upon and, although suggesting further areas of possible research and analysis, remained only partially pursued in the present work.

As a total construction in time and space, the performance of a Bali Tovil was shown to create the potential for a powerful impact upon its participants. The many elements, brought together by patrons and performers alike in order to produce the performance described, added up to an apparently satisfying experience for those involved.

From the data presented, the essential elements which went to create a successful ritual event can now be summarised. The ritual takes place in time and this time, and the accompanying sense of heightened occasion, is created by the efforts of patron and performers alike.

Externally, the patron and his supporters begin to create or define the time in which the ritual will take place from the moment the decision is made to hold the ritual. From the point where a commitment is made, there is a gradual mobilisation of resources, both material, in the form of the items required by the performers and the foodstuffs needed to treat the guests, and social, in terms of the kinsmen who will assist in the organisation and funding of the ritual and who will attend the event. With gathering momentum there develops a disjunction between the ordinary day to day routine of the patron/patient and the demands of the ritual, culminating in the actual ritual performance. On the occasion of the ritual itself, time is created internally by the performers who, by their use of drumming, song, dance and other non-ordinary, non-discursive modes of expression, generate a powerful sense of time outside ordinary time; a sacred or ritual time in illo tempore. The temporal vacuum created by the patron and the expectations this generates are filled by the performers and the carefully orchestrated and structured performance they enact. The greater the effort of organisation and mobilisation of resources on the part of the patron, the greater is the expectation that the event which ultimately transpires will have the desired impact. The capacity to construe meaning from a ritual such as the one described is thus linked fundamentally to the degree of material and

emotional input on the part of the patrons and consequently to the degree of therapeutic disjunction they feel as a result.

Crucial to this aspect of ritual performance is the nature and size of the audience which the patron creates, as a partial configuration of his own community centred upon himself. The ritual time created is paralleled by the social time created through the presence of a substantial audience. To augment ritual time, that is the length and qualitative elaboration of ritual proceedings, is also to augment social time, that is the presence and treatment of the assembled guests. In a ritual performance it is the latter which is the most costly in financial terms and which is directly indexed to status and power within the community.

Even before the ritual commences the external dynamics of the performance have set in train a process whereby the patient is positively centred in a highly supportive social environment. In the Bali Tovil this centering is further demonstrated and reinforced by a wide range of ritual actions which focus on the patient, moving him into a state of individuality and positive identity. Through a long, elaborate and often convoluted performance, the Bali Tovil persuades the patient of the possibility of a new and more positive future. The negative dos-filled past is terminated and, drawing on the powerful imagery of rebirth and regeneration, the resources of the patient are



amplified and he is projected into a qualitatively different and positive phase of life.

The account of the Bali Tovil provided in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 gives us an explication of how ritual operates in a 'traditional' context, that is, bringing together tried and tested combinations and configurations of people, actions and ideas in a rather Durkheimian celebration of community and collective sentiments. However, the example of a ritual performance provided in Chapter 8, namely the performance of a pirit ceremony, provides us with a test case to place alongside the example of the Bali Tovil. Both rituals are essentially concerned with the future and an attempt to persuade their participants of certain outcomes. The Bali Tovil seeks to achieve its effects within and through the definitions of community, personal fate and appropriate ritual action accepted by all those involved. The pirit on the other hand expresses not only an emergent sophistication on the part of the patrons but also seeks to persuade a new audience of this change. The audience is not drawn from within the caste but is drawn from outside.

The ingredients of the ritual performance organised by Sedaran are undoubtedly similar in many respects to those of the Bali Tovil. There is the creation of a sense of occasion and considerable effort and expenditure is made in so doing. Ritual specialists, albeit from a different sphere, are recruited to focalise the performance on

behalf of the Beravā patrons. The crucial difference, however, lies in the constitution of the audience which Sedaran creates to witness the event. The audience is not one that would centre Sedaran within his own community but one which would relocate him in a wider, public arena constituted more according to class interests than to those of caste. This attempt to create a new audience and persuade them of a future in which Sedaran, his family and their work are perceived differently and are ultimately accepted by the wider society on their own terms rather than in terms of caste and its hereditary associations, was only partially successful. The question of caste in fact surfaced at various points in the proceedings and the boundaries of caste were firmly upheld.

While the attempt to submerge caste through the manipulation of performative variables failed in many respects, it succeeded in certain others. In exercising power over the external and what are often perceived as incidental aspects of ritual, such as the materials collected in order for the monks to perform their specialist services, Sedaran was able to orient the event directly to the conflicts and contradictions he was experiencing as a mask-maker in his own community. Central in this respect was the highly unorthodox pirit mandapam which succeeded in juxtaposing a number of distinct categories of thought and experience within a single, highly economical and profoundly original symbolic

construction. Even if his audience remained unconvinced and unpersuaded by the nature of the ritual performance, Sedaran himself derived considerable satisfaction from the outcome of his efforts. His statement, for better or for worse, had been made publicly and subsequently provided grounds for a change in his own caste identity, seen perhaps most explicitly in the change of family name undertaken after the event.

The third and final performance to which I would like to draw attention for purposes of comparison relates to the use of dance, and to a lesser extent masks, in the tourist context also discussed in Chapter 8. In stark contrast to the two examples discussed above, the performance of dance episodes for tourists has no explicit links with a past or a future. The audience created to witness such performances is transient and is, to a considerable extent, assembled for a momentary gratification which is discontinuous with all but the most superficial aspects of the performance's style, context and ritual meaning. The audience assembled to witness the dance in tourist hotels is in some respects similar to the one Sedaran hoped to create to witness his ritual and in particular his masks, that is, one dispassionate and detached from the layers of history and association which underlie the production of each mask.

In the context of performance for tourists the dance becomes a generalised symbol of the exotic and its



indexical significance comes into being, away from the place of actual performance. Its value lies in the prestige of tales retold, photographs and souvenirs brought home from the holiday or vacation. As the dance becomes an aspect of wage labour, and commercialisation renders healing as edited entertainment, the act of performance comes to acquire new significance for its performers. The traditions upon which it is founded are progressively re-evaluated according to wholly different criteria, which, in the short term at least, peel off the meaning, significance and resonances of certain actions from the social fabric in which they are embedded. The 'devil dancers of Ceylon' become a 'must' for tourist audiences while forming yet another component in the perennial search for a 'National' identity which characterises many post-colonial societies. Similarly, the significance of devil dance masks, wrenched from their original context, mutely displayed, row upon row in the shops and hotels frequented by tourists, is no longer under the control of their producers. The masks are subject to a process of re-definition which lies far beyond the context of their traditional production and use.

In the short term, many of the changes outlined above will undoubtedly have considerable effects upon the lives and work of members of the Beravā caste, whether they are directly or indirectly involved with the sources of

change.

In the long term, however, it would be very difficult to predict what the effects of these changes might be. On the one hand the structures I have described to account for the reproduction of traditions, their resilience and persistence, may prevail in accommodating what are in fact short term and local fluctuations in markets and consequently the styles of production. In future years Sedaran and his ilk might appear as just scratches upon the surface of a deeply engrained structure which revolves around community, identity, work and a total way of life. It is also possible and highly likely that this structure has been under similar threats for the past three hundred years and yet has always mustered the energy and ingenuity to ensure its own persistence.

On the other hand, the changes described may indeed, in a relatively short space of time, poison the roots of tradition and set in train an irreversible process of domestication, as the traditions possessed by groups like the Beravā become exploited in the interests of business and commercialisation. What was previously earthy, vibrant and pungent to refined nostrils is rendered acceptable, tame and even evocative of nostalgia for audiences who view from a considerable cultural distance, whether it is from Europe or Colombo Seven.

My own view is that both possibilities are to a degree inevitably likely to occur: internally, the Beravā

will resist changes to their way of life but they will also be continually forced to re-define their own community and the meanings they carry as a community for the rest of society. The impact of change will undoubtedly fragment what I have portrayed as a stable, coherent and solidary structure. However the process whereby traditions have been reproduced has probably always been incomplete, relatively unintegrated and in a state of disorder which is continually ordered with the benefit of hindsight. Tradition is the history of creativity. Thus, even though the content and context of traditions might change beyond recognition, for a considerable time to come members of the Beravā caste will be responsible for a significant dimension of Sinhalese society's institutionalised creativity; they will remain the carriers of ritual knowledge and consequently the makers of meaning. As long as they remain on the margins of their own society and retain aspects of their despised origins, they will be sought out for their 'privileged' perceptions upon, and incisive interpretations of, the normative social reality through which they pass like ghosts, periodically creating the world anew only to pass unseen and unsung to their next act of creation.

'...These our actors,

as I foretold you, were all spirits, and



Are melted into air, into thin air,  
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And like this insubstantial pageant faded  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on; and our little life  
is rounded with a sleep.'

Shakespeare

APPENDIX I  
THE RITUALS OF THE BERAṬĀ

The Mahā Sohōṇa Samayama

This ceremony is intended to release a person from the malign attentions of Mahā Sohōṇ, 'The Great Cemetery Demon', perhaps the most terrifying of all Sinhalese demons. Mahā Sohōṇ manifests himself to his victims in a variety of forms which include a pig, an old man, a wolf and a bear, but his most fearsome manifestation is as a blue-bodied dog, relentlessly pursuing his victims with a lolling tongue and blood-curdling howls (see Plate XVII). He is the stuff of nightmares and strikes fear into the bravest of men.

He frequents graveyards, slaughterhouses and other lonely and unclean places. He is attracted to the smell of impurity, as from fried food, meat, excrement, menstrual blood and the like, and strikes his victims when they are alone. He is most potent at mid-day and



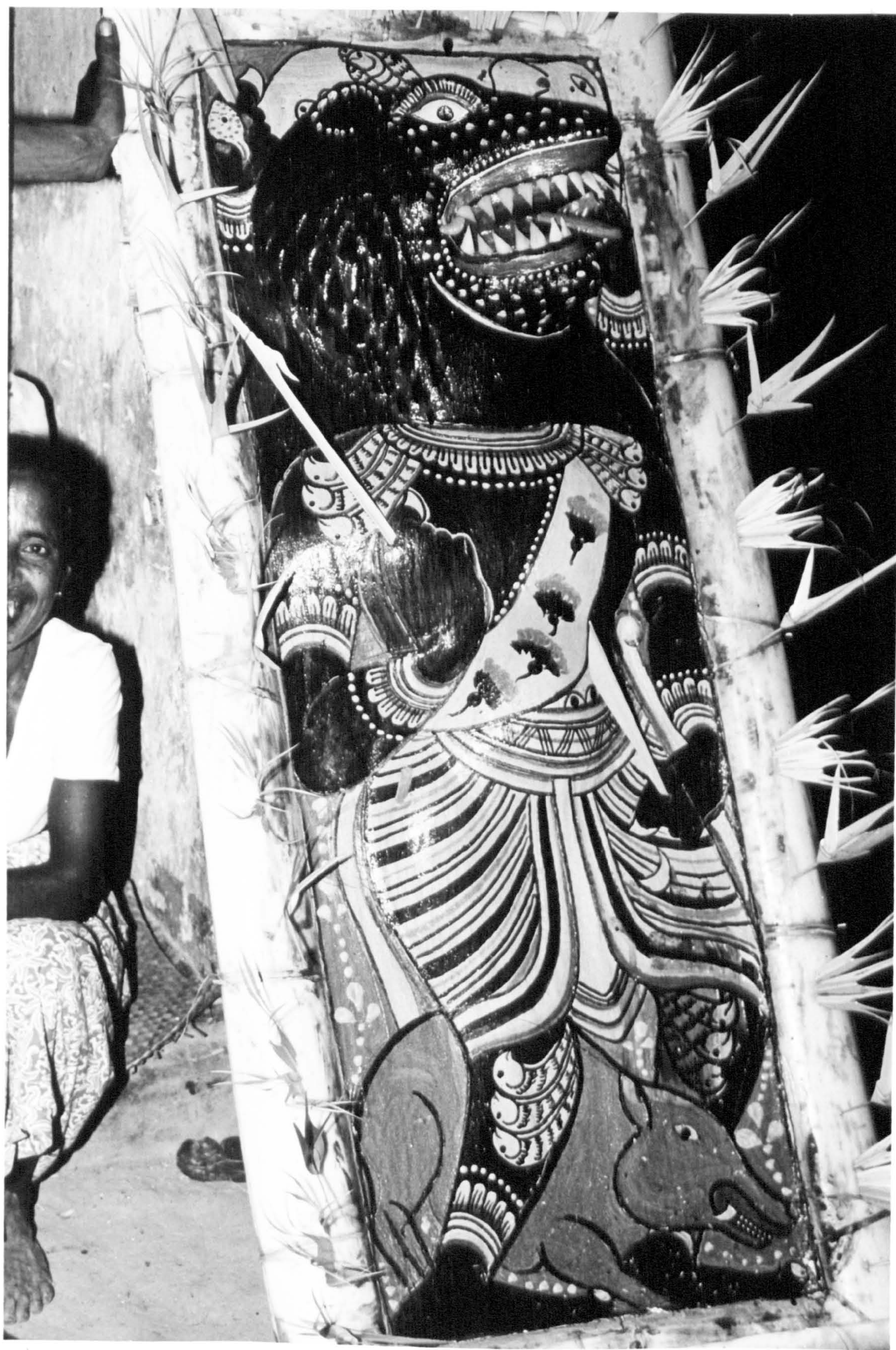


Plate XVII. The Demon Mahā Sohōna.



mid-night, capturing his victims in his gaze (bāḷma) and infusing them with his demonic essence (diṣṭi).

As well as psychological disturbance, possession by Mahā Sohōn also manifests itself physiologically, due to imbalances caused by him in the three humours (tun dosa) and particularly the humour of bile (pita). An excess of bile in the body is believed to manifest itself in conditions such as dizziness, vomiting, fever, aching joints and dysentery. Possession by Mahā Sohōn is diagnosed from the symptoms of physical illness as well as from the general psychological state of the patient (see Kapferer 1979:95).

The effects of Mahā Sohōn, once identified, are relieved by the exorcist (ādura) by actions aimed at several different levels. These levels can be roughly divided into two categories. On the one hand there is the elaborate observance of the etiquette of making offerings to Mahā Sohōn and his demon associates, and on the other the purification and reassurance of the patient using a variety of ritual devices which include comedy and drama (cf. Kapferer 1977).

The fulfilment of the contractual aspects of the ritual through making offerings is carried out in the first phase of the ritual between 6.00 p.m. and 10.00 p.m. approximately. During this phase, offerings (dola) are made on specially constructed trays (pīdēniya and tattuva). The offerings consist of burnt and fried

seeds and foods, shredded flowers, alcohol and other impure items, all deemed highly attractive to demons. It is in this first phase that the esoteric lore of the exorcist comes into its own, as, through magical formulae, prayers, songs and supplications, he tries to entice the demons to accept the offerings and release the patient from their malevolent grip. The first phase of the ritual is brought to an end with an episode known as 'Death Time' or 'ava mangala', in which an exorcist presents himself as a corpse, in order that the demons might avert their interest from the patient onto his apparently dead body. This episode is particularly dangerous for the exorcist as he lies in a corpse-like position before the patient, people wailing over him, as if in mourning. Eventually, he is carried away on a mock funeral bier (darahēva), to a similarly mock cremation ground (kurālaya), where in his stead a straw image (pambaya) is cremated. The demons are deceived into accepting an inanimate sacrifice by the manipulation of the symbols and signs of death and cremation. As with the offering trays, the malign attentions of the demons are directed away from the patient onto inanimate, disposable, and hence safe, objects.

The second phase of the ritual takes place over the mid-night period and contains wild dancing and drumming, in the midst of which the dancers take upon themselves the essence (disti) of the demon (see Plate XVIII). The





Plate XVIII. An exorcist summons the Demon Mahā Sohōna.



heightened states of the dancers are facilitated by the inhalation of incense, exhausting dances and hypnotic drumming. they are communicated to the audience in such feats as juggling, fire-eating and gravity defying acrobatics. It is in this sequence that the patient is most likely to enter into trance and to speak on behalf of the demon. Where this occurs the demon voices acceptance of the offerings or else makes further demands and conditions, but ultimately the patient utters a public statement that the demon is about to leave.

The end of this phase, between 1.00 a.m. and 3.00 a.m., marks the end of the 'serious' business of the ritual and, to use Langer's formulation (Kapferer 1977:111-117), there is a shift from a presentational mode to a discursive mode of ritual performance. Offerings are made to the god Mangara, the deity believed to assert authority over Mahā Sohōn. The offering is made in the form of a procession (Mangara Pela Pāliya) rather like a pārahāra. In the procession are objects of state regalia such as drums, flags, umbrellas and an elephant, as well as items intended to please the god such as a stick dance and a violin. Each of the items is made from gok-kola) and banana tree trunks and they are presented one at a time, accompanied by an ongoing comic commentary in the form of a dialogue between the performers. In the dialogue the objects are identified and explained to the audience with a good deal of punning and double entendre.

In some rituals the Mangara Pela Pāliya is followed by the appearance of a dancer dressed as Mahā Sohōn, complete with terrifying wolf mask. His departure from the arena marks the expulsion of the influence of the demon Mahā Sohōn.

The final major episode of the ritual is the Dahā-ata Pāliya, the parade of the eighteen Sanni demons, the bringers of disease. This episode is currently very popular on account of the fact that many of the demons have developed comic characters in the hands of the exorcists. As they come forward one by one, each in different mask and costume, the dancers engage in comic banter with the drummers. The dialogues are both vulgar and irreverent, relying heavily on the inversion of everyday meanings and the lampooning of sacred objects and persons, such as monks and bo-trees. The inversion of everyday meanings is consistent with the behaviour of demons attempting to operate in the human world. It is in this sequence that the skills of the performers as actors and comedians are brought to the fore and it is their explicit intention to make both patient and audience laugh.

Demons who were once terrifying are rendered harmless and pathetic as the exorcists illustrate their ineptitude in the human world. The patient ceases to be the subject of a performance upon which the audience gaze but is moved back into the audience by the power of the shared

perception of comedy and humour. Once the patient is seen to laugh the second aim of the ritual is assumed to have been achieved. The patient, like the rest of the audience, is gazing upon the ridiculous spectacle of demons, who are in fact masked actors, trying to assert themselves in a place where they do not belong: the world of men. Ideally the patient comes to see the world as a non-afflicted Sinhalese would see it (Kapferer op cit).

The ritual is brought to an end shortly after sunrise with a series of small ritual episodes to ensure that the patient is thoroughly released from all ills and will go on to live in health and prosperity. These include the offering of an image of Mahā Sohōn (Mahā Sohōn Baliya Pāvadīma) and the intoning of numerous mantra.

By about 8.30 a.m. the ritual structures have all been dismantled and the debris of the night's performance swept away and left to rot. The exorcists by this time have bathed and departed leaving little visible trace of the spectacle which they fleetingly created.

The Mahā Sohōnā Samayama is undoubtedly one of the most popular ceremonies performed in the South today. However, it is unlikely that it has always been in the form described above. The making of offerings to demons is a practice of great antiquity but many of the dramatic episodes which are now included have been developed within the lifetimes of many of my older informants. This is particularly true of many of the comic interludes which



characterise the third phase of the ritual.

The Mahā Sohōna Samayama is on occasion performed in conjunction with the Ira Mudun Pīdēniya, a special offering made at mid-day when the sun is at its zenith. This ritual commences around 8.00 a.m. and continues until 2.00 p.m. on the day before the ritual proper. The content of the Ira Mudun Pīdēniya is similar to the first phase of the Mahā Sohōna Samayama, with major offerings being given to Mahā Sohōn, the Blood Demon (Rīri Yakka), the Black Demon (Kālu Yakka), the Disease Demon (Sanni Yakka) and the Sorcery Demon (Suniyam Yakka). The ritual also contains the ava mangala episode but there are no dramatic episodes as in the Mahā Sohōna Samayama proper.

An elaborate Mahā Sohōna Samayama may require four dancers, 3 drummers and one man skilled in the use of magical formulae (mantrakārayā), but the ritual can be performed on a smaller scale with three or four performers, taking at least one from each of the above categories. The smaller rituals miss out or condense certain ritual episodes due to the limitations of cost and the size of the troupe. Rituals with any less personnel are not proper ceremonies (tovil) but are rather called simply offerings (pīdēni dīma) and can be performed by a sole exorcist.

The cost of the ritual is reckoned according to the number and quality of the performers involved and consequently the thoroughness and elaboration with which

the ritual is performed. The very cheapest offering can be made for around 300 Rs., whilst a major tovil might cost between 2000 and 3000 Rs. (between £70 and £100 in 1979).

#### Raṭa Yakkuma or Riddi Yāgaya

This ritual is primarily intended to relieve the ill effects caused by the demon Kālu Kumāra, 'the Black Prince'. Kālu Kumāra is believed to have arisen in India which gives the ritual its first title, literally, 'the Foreign Demon Exorcism'. Kālu Kumāra was reborn a demon after straying into a country inhabited only by women where he was ripped to pieces by the love-starved inhabitants. As a consequence of this unfortunate death, Kālu Kumāra turned his attentions towards women, whom he now afflicts with barrenness and other gynaecological disorders.

As well as being performed for barren women, the ritual is also performed for pregnant women, usually in the third, fifth, or seventh month of pregnancy and can even be performed up until a child is six months old (providing the mother is still breast-feeding).

Kālu Kumāra is believed to break a baby's neck and drink its blood whilst it is still in the womb and is particularly feared by pregnant women. On account of this it is not unusual to have a Raṭa Yakkuma performed as a safety precaution, especially if there have been previous

difficulties. In such cases the ritual provides a powerful means of drawing attention to the woman's condition which might otherwise be concealed by her tightly controlled domestic context.

The ritual takes a similar overall form to the Mahā Sohōna Samayama, with the first part focussing on the making of offerings to the demons and the second consisting mainly of the dramatisation of myths and stories which communicate directly to the patient and audience.

In the first phase, offerings are made to Kālu Kumāra and the Kālu Yakka, one of his main associates. Special offerings are made to the seven Barren Queens (Hat Vanda Bisavun), demonesses believed to assist Kālu Kumāra in his affliction of women. All offerings are solemnly dedicated to the demon with prayers, pleas and panegyric poems. After the offerings have been made the avamangala episode is performed, as in the Mahā Sohōna Samayama, an exorcist presenting himself as a substitute corpse.

With the completion of the major offering sequences at around 10.00 p.m., the Mahā Samayama of the Raṭa Yakkuma commences. It is in this phase that the influences of the Seven Barren Demon Queens (Ridi Bisavō or Ridi Yaksini) is believed to be attracted to the arena and those within. The intensification of presence which characterises this episode is achieved through wild and mesmeric dances and the thunderous and incessant rhythm of the drum. The



climax of the episode comes with the casting of a white cloth onto the roof of the ritual structure which faces the patient, the Raṭa Yakkun Vīdiya. The instant of casting and unfolding the specially knotted cloth heralds the arrival of the Seven Barren Queens. Following this, seven torches (pandam) are placed on seven altars (mēsa) inside the vīdiya, and the whole structure is enveloped in flames from the burning of tree resin (dummala). This latter act is said to signify the conflagration on Mount Meru, out of which the Seven Barren Queens emerged.

At around 2.00 a.m. a dramatic sequence known as the Nānumōra Pāliya commences in which one of the dancers enacts the role of one of the seven queens engaged in her toilette. In the first sequence an exorcist dressed symbolically as a woman, that is wearing a ladies bodice and cloth and wearing long hair made from strips of young coconut, performs the very private act of bathing, in full public view. The mime is carried out with much ribald humour, amidst taunts and jeers from the audience, particularly the male contingent. The precisely observed antics of a shy young woman bathing and washing her hair are mimed to perfection as the dancer goes through the 'twelve actions' (dolos pela pāliya). The twelve actions being as follows: the application of lotion (nānu), limes (dehi) and soap (saban) to the head; combing the hair with a comb (panāva), applying oil

(tel): fitting a false hair-piece (havarīya) and pinning it into place (kaṭu gahanavā); fitting ear-rings (ran-tōru), a necklace (mālaya) and bangals (kārambu); applying sandalwood (sandun gāma) and finally looking in a mirror. All props used in the mime are exquisitely fashioned from young coconut and banana stems and are kept in a special tray (nānumōra vaṭṭiya), from which they are removed in sequence for use. Once the purification of the 'woman' is completed there commences a second sequence in which an exorcist, superbly made up as a woman, complete with sari, imitation breasts and false hair-piece, elegantly struts into the arena to perform the Kapu Kātīma, 'The Spinning of Cotton'. Upon entering the arena the woman receives gentle taunts from the audience, which despite her apparent coyness, she parries, much to the delight of the audience, in a less than lady-like manner. She sits on a mat in the centre of the arena and begins to relate the story of Dipankāra Buddha to a member of the audience, who, having been volunteered for the job, sits in embarrassed silence at the opposite end of the mat. The story tells how the barren queens made a vow to this earlier Buddha in order to rid themselves of their barrenness. The fulfilment of this vow required them to purify themselves (hence the Nānumōra Pāliya) before embarking on the making of a special cloth. First they were to clear a chēna or swidden plot and plant cotton

trees (kapok). Once the kapok grew, they were to pick, select and grade the cotton, before spinning and weaving it into a piece of cloth. The cloth was to be soaked in pāndu, the orange dye used for monks' robes, and finally presented as an offering to Dipankāra Buddha (salu pujāva).

The events described above are graphically enacted in the Kapu Kātīma episode in which the origin of kapok is recited as it is plucked from an imitation kapok tree (see Plate XIX). The cotton is weighed and sorted using imitation scales and finally spun into a piece of cloth using an imitation spinning machine. A real piece of cloth is produced as the finished item and is placed on a special tray which is held before the patient. The patient casts her evils onto the tray three times, moving her hands from her temples to the tray (tun pārak ata paravalā). Throughout the sequence the 'woman' carries on an amusing and provocative dialogue with the man opposite her on the mat. It centres on the actions she is carrying out and also the problems of marriage, with witty sexual references throughout (see Kapferer 1977:106-107).

In the next sequence, the Darunelavila or Baby-lulling, the actor goes through a mime in which he carefully bathes and breast-feeds a doll. After a detailed portrayal of exaggerated and inept motherhood the baby is presented to the patient.

At this point the Raṭa Yakkuma proper is over, bar a





Plate XIX. Cotton is extracted from an imitation kapok tree during the Kapu Kātīma episode of the Rāṭa Yakkuma.



few small offerings still to be made. The dramatic elaboration of the latter episodes in this ritual is, as with other rituals, of relatively recent origin. One aspect of the Raṭa Yakkuma which is certainly of recent origin is the inclusion of the Daḥā aṭa Pāliya. All of my informants agreed that this episode is nowadays included because the audience expects it. Indeed, some went as far as to say that it was actually dangerous to include it given the delicate condition of the patient and the terrifying appearance of many of the demons who appear in it. For example, the entrance of the Māru Sanniya, the Demon of Death, who in my experience is more likely to induce miscarriage than prevent it.

The ritual is brought to a close in the early hours of the morning with the offering of an image (baliya) of Kālu Kumāra and requests for the protection of the patient.

Raṭa Yakkuma require similar numbers of performers, and are of comparable cost, to the Mahā Sohōna Samayama described above. A small ritual known as the Raṭa Yakkun Pīdēniya, which has no dramatic interludes, is often performed where lack of funds prevents the performance of a major ceremony.

#### Sanni Yakkuma

This ritual is intended to propitiate the Sanni demon and his associates who bring a variety of diseases and

disorders upon their victims. The Sanni are eighteen in number and are led by the Kōla Sanniya, the most powerful of their number. Each Sanni demon is named after a disease which he is believed to visit upon his victims by disrupting one or all of the three humours (tun dosa kipanavā). The Sanni demons can be held responsible for anything from insanity to dysentery.

In the Akuressa area the Sanni Yakkuma as such is nowadays not much performed, and those that were performed were very similar to the Mahā Sohōna Samayama, except for the absence of the Mangara Pela Pāliya and the appearance of Mahā Sohōn, and an added emphasis on offerings to the Sanni Yakka in the early episodes.

At one time, however, there was a special dramatic episode particular to the Sanni Yakkuma, which few performers today know, let alone are able to perform. The episode is the dance of the Liccavi kings, in which the origin myth of the Sanni demons is enacted (Obeyesekere 1969:213). The dance of the Liccavi kings involved the dancers wearing pink costumes which represented the transparent skin of the twins who founded the Liccavi dynasty.

The dance of the Liccavi kings preceded what is nowadays the main dramatic episodes of the ritual; these are the 'Parade of the Eight Objects' (Aṭa-pāliya) and the 'Parade of the Eighteen Sanni Demons' (Dahā aṭa Sanniya). In the Aṭa-pāliya, eight key objects are brought forwards



by masked actors and presented to the patient. These items are as follows: torches (pandam) (see Plate XX), cloth (salu), a water jug (kandiya), a pot (kalasa), a king coconut (tāmbilī), a betel leaf (dalumōraya), a brazier with incense (angurudummala) and finally a cock-bird (kukula). With the exception of the first, the Pandam Pāliya, each of the apparitions enters into comic dialogue with the drummer concerning the objects they have brought.

Once the eight objects have been presented, the Parade of the Eighteen Demons proper starts. Originally each of the eighteen Sanni demons would present themselves in turn, giving their songs of origin (upata) and displaying the characteristics of the illness they bring. Nowadays, only about eight or nine of the Sanni demons make their appearance, and those who can perform the entire Dahā aṭa Sanniya, enacting all eighteen demons, are few and far between.

The Dahā aṭa Pāliya performed in the Sanni Yakkuma is different from the ones performed in other rituals by virtue of the fact that it ends with the arrival of the Kōla Sanniya, who is masked and wearing a special hat and waistband made from young coconut and banana stems. The Kōla Sanniya seeks to gain access to the patient but finds his way barred by two drummers holding crossed rice pounders. A comic dialogue ensues in which the demon attempts to trick, bribe and cajole the drummers into





Plate XX. The Torch Bearing Apparition (Pandam Pāliya) makes his entrance during the Dahā-ata Sanniya.



giving him access to the patient. Eventually the demon departs and returns with a strip of palm leaf upon which he claims is written authority (varan) from the Buddha allowing the demon to afflict the patient. However, upon examination, it is revealed that the paper contains a decree that Kōla Sanniya should perform no more evil in the place, accept his offerings and leave. Tricked and defeated, the Kōla Sanniya is driven away amidst insults and taunts from the drummers (cf. Obeyesekere op cit: 207-209). The ritual is brought to a close with the intoning of protective mantra and the drawing up of a talisman (yantra) to ensure future protection.

The reasons for the apparent demise in popularity of the Sanni Yakkuma can possibly be found in the rise in popularity of the Dahā aṭa Pāliya as an entity in itself, as much for its entertainment content as for its curative intentions. Nowadays the Dahā aṭa Pāliya figures in almost all exorcism ceremonies and is playing a growing part therein. The frequency with which the Mahā Sohōna Samayama is nowadays performed might lead one to further suggest that this ritual, in incorporating elements from the Sanni Yakkuma, is fulfilling the bulk of ritual requirements for exorcism.

### Suniyam

Unlike the three rituals described above, the Suniyam is not, strictly speaking, an exorcism (yak tovil), but



a blessing ceremony (sāntiya). The demon to whom the ritual is directed, Suniyam, occupies a slightly elevated position in the pantheon on account of the fact that he spends half his time a demon (Suniyam Yakka), and the other half as a god (Suniyam Dēvatāva), and in consequence the ritual approaches made to him are somewhat more refined. Suniyam is not directly associated with physical disorders caused by imbalances in the three humours but is the agent of sorcery and malevolence. When a sorcery (kodivina) is performed, it is this demon who is invoked and it is to him that appeal is made when a sorcery is to be cut (kodivina kḥpīma). Whilst the victim of a sorcery might suspect who has actually perpetrated it, the ritual in no way attempts to locate or name the individual responsible, but rather attempts to avert and nullify all possible sources of malevolence.

In a broad sense the ritual follows a similar pattern to those described above. The first part of the ritual is taken up with carefully ordered rounds of invocation and supplication, and offerings to the various demons and their associates. The second part is taken up with the enactment of a mythical drama and an attempt to stop the physical effects of sorcery by cutting various objects.

The ritual takes place in a specially built shed (maduva) which is decorated with unripe fruits (gāta pala). The focus of the ritual is a magnificent structure (Suniyam vīdiya), intricately decorated and

bearing representations of the demon Suniyam. Behind the ornate frontage of the vīdiya is a cage-like structure, intensely magical in its design and construction. It is square and oriented to the eight cardinal points (ata kōna), the square is divided into eight sections and each of the eight directions are guarded by symbolic weapons (āyudha). Also at each of the eight cardinal points are kept offerings of betel leaves (dalumōra) and coins. The ninth point, the centre of the vīdiya, is marked by a coin and betel leaf. On the floor of the vīdiya a magical diagram (yantra) is drawn in ash (alu) made from the wood of five different citrus trees (pas pāngiri). The yantra is covered with a mat (pāduru) and a second yantra is drawn in rice (hāl); this is again covered with a mat. It is in the centre of this yantra that the patient will eventually come to sit.

The ritual proper commences with the patient seated opposite the vīdiya. He or she is first ritually cleansed by the application of lotion (nānu gāma), lustration with turmeric water (kahadiya sādīma) (see Plate XXI), the application of oil (tel) and sandalwood (sandun) and finally a white cloth is placed over the patient's head (moṭṭakkiliya pālandīma). Each action is accompanied by copious recitations of prayers and poems which give commentary on the Adurā's actions and their origins. Offerings are made to the Four Guardian Deities





Plate XXI. An exorcist flicks turmeric water onto his patient during a Suniyam ceremony.



(Hatara Varan Dēviyō): Saman, Viṣṇu, Kataragama and Nāta. In poems which tell of the origin of the vīdiya and of its beautiful decoration (maḍu sārasiḷla) the patient is gradually introduced to the ritual space.

In the sequence which follows, the patient is taken on a ritual journey of seven steps (hat aḍiya) across the dancing arena and actually into the vīdiya through a small hole in its front. The seven steps represent the seven steps which Buddha took after he gained enlightenment. The hat aḍiya ceremony takes about three or four hours to complete on account of the many actions and recitations which each have to be performed seven times over. The sequence commences with the laying down of seven circles of ash made from burnt citrus wood and cow dung (goma). In these circles are inscribed the first syllables of the names of the seven planets. On top of each of the seven circles are then placed a symbolic lotus flower (piyum mal) made of young coconut and banana stem. Into each of these lotus flowers is placed offerings of coins (panduru), betel leaves (bulat), limes (dehi) and torches (vilakku). Each offering is accompanied by dedications, poems of origin and jātaka stories. Once the offerings are completed the patient, still seated, commences his seven-fold movement. The origin of the areca-nut cutters is recited (gire upata) and at each lotus flower a lime is cut over the head of the patient with the cutters. After each step the lotus

flowers and offerings are thrown away into a sack (malla). After the seventh step is completed, the patient is bundled through a small entrance in the front of the vīdiya. Simultaneously, a coconut is smashed and examined as an augury to the effectiveness of the ritual.

After the long and intense hat adiya ceremony there follows a light-hearted episode called the Vadiga Patuna. In this episode the arrival of four brahmins from the port of Vadiga in north India is enacted. Their arrival at the arena is met by a rather crude stereotype of a Sinhalese villager, played by the drummer. The episode plays considerably on the problem of language and cultural differences, to great comic effect.

Nowadays, this episode is followed by the Dahā aṭa Pāliya, but, as with other rituals, this episode does not really belong to the Suniyam.

The remainder of the ceremony, which lasts well into the next day, is primarily devoted to the cutting of sixteen objects (solos tinduva). Before the cutting can commence, however, the patient has to be dressed and bound from head to foot with medicinal vines (vel pālandīma). The vines, supposedly 108 different varieties, are bound into a crown (otuna) and numerous rings which are placed around the patient's body. Once on the patient's body the vines are cut in strict order and disposed of into the sack. The vines account for three of the sixteen objects to be cut, that is, the rings on the arms, the

legs and the crown. The next objects to be cut are known as 'The Five Great Verdicts' (Panca Mahā Tinduva), the cutting of which marks the consummation of the ritual. These five objects are an unripe pineapple (gāta annāsi), a king coconut (tāmbili), a coconut flower (tāmbili mal), a yam (hondalāli) and an ash pumpkin (puhul gediya). The objects are all kept in a special tray (tindu vaṭṭiya) and removed one at a time to be cut with a large knife (kaṭṭa) on the threshold of the vīdiya which is marked by a rice pounder (mol gaha). With each cut various mantra are intoned to ensure the sorcery is also cut. Before the cutting of the ash pumpkin, there is a special sequence in which the vīdiya itself is cut (vīdiya kṣipīma). With the patient still inside the vīdiya, an Ḍdurā enters a trance and repeatedly attacks the structure with a machete, smashing to pieces the once beautiful decorations. After a terrifying performance, the vīdiya is reduced to a heap of sticks and debris. By the end of the performance the patient is left sitting in open space in the arena. After the cutting of the vīdiya the dancer falls exhausted to the floor and invariably needs to be revived using mantra and lustration with tumeric water.

The final episode of the ritual is the cutting of the ash pumpkin, the sixteenth object to be cut. This action is carried out by the patient him or herself, as the Ḍdurā lies prostrate with the balloon-like pumpkin on



his chest, inviting the patient to cut by stages through the pumpkin. At each stage the adura intones mantra and pleads for the protection and blessing of the patient. With the cutting through of the pumpkin the ritual is brought to a close.

A Suniyam of the type described above might require as many as eight or ten people, who may be engaged for up to eighteen hours and spend two days prior to the actual ritual constructing the vīdiya. Whilst the simple cutting of a sorcery (kodivina kṛpīma) can be performed relatively cheaply, a major Suniyam cannot, and may cost in excess of 3000 Rs.

## APPENDIX II

## THE RAW MATERIALS OF RITUAL

The following list is an example of the type of list given to a person wishing to hold a ritual. In this case the ritual was a Bali Tovil in which five clay images were to be constructed, but the items requested are fairly typical of the basic materials which have to be collected for the performance of any major ritual. Notes have been given after each item to give some idea of their purpose.

1. Six plantain trunks (kesel kandan):- these are reminiscent of giant leeks and once their many layers are unferled provide numerous, malleable and plastic-like strips which are fashioned into offering trays and frames for the images.
2. Ten tender, unferled coconut branches (gok-kola):- strips are cut away from the spines of the leaves to form tough ribbon-like strips which are skillfully folded and

cut to form many of the decorations around the ritual arena. The spines of the unferled leaves are used as staples to hold various constructions together.

3. Four coconut flowers (pol mal):- these are used in their unferled state as decorations, placed in pots they serve as symbols of fertility and abundance.

4. Four areca-nut flowers (puwak mal):- these are used as an auspicious form of decoration and kept as offerings in the trays. The areca-nut is believed to have healing properties and as such its flowers recur throughout the ritual.

5. Twenty-five riyan of rough planking (one riyan = 18"):- these are used to make the frames upon which the clay images will stand.

6. Twenty coconut branches:- used in the making of cadjans, plaited coverings. The spines of the mature coconut fronds are also used in various aspects of the construction of the clay images.

7. Four king coconuts (tāmbill):- used as decoration for the arena and also kept as offerings.

8. Two bags of clay:- the clay used for the construction of images is a fine pipe-clay (makulu) usually taken from a termite hill.

9. Nine kinds of each of the following:- flowers (mal), sweetmeat (kūvill) and seeds (ḥṭa).

Sequences of nine types of offering are given throughout Bali Tovil generally, they are offerings for each of the



nine planets. In other cases I have seen nine types of leaf (kola) and nine types of cooked vegetable (elōlu) are offered. Also five kinds of fried things (panca pullutu) are sometimes requested as an offering to the chief of the demons (Senādipati Yakka).

10. One bottle of pas tel, literally 'Five Oils':- this is a mixture of five medicinal oils: castor oil (endaru tel), gingelly or sesame oil (tala tel), ghee (elangi tel), margosa oil (kohomba tel) and an oil made from a particular type of seed (mī tel). The oil is used to fire the nine clay oil lamps dedicated to the nine planets.

11. Twenty five tender limes (dehi gāta):- the lime fruit figures in almost all Sinhalese healing rituals because of its great medicinal and healing properties.

12. Eight citronella sticks (pāngiri koṭu):- the sticks are used to make the eight verticals of the two-tiered aṭa-magala pīdēniya, the eight-sided offering tray intended to absorb malevolent influences.

13. Two balls of thread (nūl bōla):- throughout the ritual the patient is kept in contact with the display of images by means of a thread held in the hand.

14. Two packets of camphor (kapuru):- kept as an offering and also burnt liberally throughout the night.

16. One quarter of a pound of sandalwood scented incense (sudu sandun):- used as in (15).

17. Two ounces of rosewater (pinidiyara):- kept as an

offering in the ata magala pīḍēniya.

18. Two packets of joss sticks (sandun kuru):- burnt on the frames of the images throughout the night.

19. Eleven clay cooking pots (kalasa):- nine of these pots are used to make pun or purna kalasa, vases of coconut flowers, traditional symbols of prosperity and abundance.

20. Two unused clay cooking pots (namun valan):- these are filled with tumeric water and placed on either side of the patient to be used as receptacles for various items, such as areca-nut flowers, cast into them during the night.

21. Fifteen clay oil lamps (māti pahan):- nine of these are used to illuminate the pun kalasa, which are located around the perimeter of the arena and dedicated to the nine planets. The remainder are placed on the various offering trays.

22. One mat (pāduru):- this is kept at the feet of the patient and certain auspicious objects are placed on it.

23. Three yards of white cloth:- the cloth is used to make the veil (kaḍaturāva) which separates the patient from the arena during the early phases of the ritual.

24. Sixty coins of small denomination (panduru):- given as offerings throughout the ritual.

25. Twelve coconuts (pol geḍi):- nine are used as offerings to the planets, the remainder are used to decorate the ritual arena.

26. One yard of patterned cloth containing five colours (panca pāṭa redi):- this cloth is used to cover the central flower offering (asu-ek gāba mal baliya) up until its opening (ārīma) in the first phase of the ritual.

27. Four torches (pandam):- the torches are made from sticks wound around with strips of cloth and soaked in coconut oil. They are used by the dancers during performance and are skillfully incorporated into their movements.

28. One hundred and eight small torches (vilakku):- these smaller torches are rolled, cloth wicks, soaked in oil. In the course of the ritual they are cast into the clay pots on either side of the patient and thus extinguished by the tumeric water.

29. Four ounces of each of the following colours - red, yellow, and blue:- the colours are used to paint the images. The colours are nowadays bought ready made but originally were made from natural pigments. Coomaraswamy (1908:177) gives the following description of the painting of Bali images:

'the finished images when a little dried, are first whitened with kaolin paste, then painted in colours, red, green, grey and black. The red is made from pounded iron oxide (guru gala) as used for the slip painting of pottery; the green from pounded leaves of ranavara (cassia auriculata); the black from pounded coconut shell charcoal; grey by mixing kaolin with black.'

30. Eight skeins of string:- the string is used to



secure the images to their frames in an upright position.

31. A piece of sandalwood (sudusandun):- the wood is grated and added to milk and tumeric water to form a highly purifying paste (sandun kiri) which is mixed into the clay of the images and also applied to the floor of the dancing arena.

32. Raw tumeric (amu kaha):- this is used throughout the ritual as a purifying agent, usually made into a solution.

33. Two pounds of powdered tree resin (dummala):- dummala is used in two ways throughout the ritual. First, it is used as incense, the powder being cast onto burning embers to produce a pungent white smoke. Secondly, it is cast onto flames to produce a spectacular pyrotechnic effect (kīla gahanavā).

34. Small amounts of each of the following are required as offerings to be kept in the aṭa magala pīḍēniya:- jaggery, bees' honey, cow's milk, whey, ghee, butter and olives (veralu).

Finally, although not given on the list, it is assumed that the hosts are responsible for contacting the local washerman in order to arrange for the provision of cloths (hēlaya). The cloths are long white rectangles which are wrapped around the performers' lower bodies. White cloth is also required for the overhead canopy (uḍu viyan) which is suspended above the array of clay images

to protect them.

## APPENDIX III (TO CHAPTER 5)

## ASTROLOGY: HOROSCOPES AND PLANETARY PERIODS

The birth horoscope (janma patraya or kēndraya) is normally constructed at the time of birth. The astrologer using an almanac (lita) inscribes all the relevant details concerning the positions of the planets at the instant of birth on a strip of ola leaf (puskola). The planets in Sinhalese astrology are nine in number and correspond to the following:

1. Sun	Iru, Ravi or Sūriya
2. Moon	Handa, Sōma or Chandra
3. Mars	Angharu, Mangala, or Kuja
4. Dragon's Head	Rāhu
5. Jupiter	Brahaspati or Guru
6. Saturn	Senasuru or Sani
7. Mercury	Budha or Budahu
8. Venus	Sikuru, Sukra or Kivi



### 9. Dragon's Tail Kētu

(Strictly speaking Rāhu and Kētu are not planets but are the ascending and descending nodes of the moon.) The planets at birth are located in each of the twelve signs of the zodiac (dolos rāsi) which in Sinhalese are as follows\*-

1. Aries	Mesa
2. Taurus	Vrṣabha
3. Gemini	Mithuna
4. Cancer	Kataka
5. Leo	Singha
6. Virgo	Kanyā
7. Libra	Tula
8. Scorpio	Vrṣcika
9. Saggitarious	Dhānu
10. Capricorn	Makara
11. Aquarius	Kumbha
12. Pisces	Mīna

The location of the planets in their particular positions on the ecliptic is represented graphically in the horoscope by means of a diagram containing the twelve divisions of the zodiac (rāsi cak raya). In the horoscope reproduced in Figure 16, this is the section of the horoscope marked A. This diagram indicates the sign of the zodiac over the eastern horizon at the time of birth, otherwise known as the ascendant (lagna). The ascendant is marked in the centre of the diagram, in this

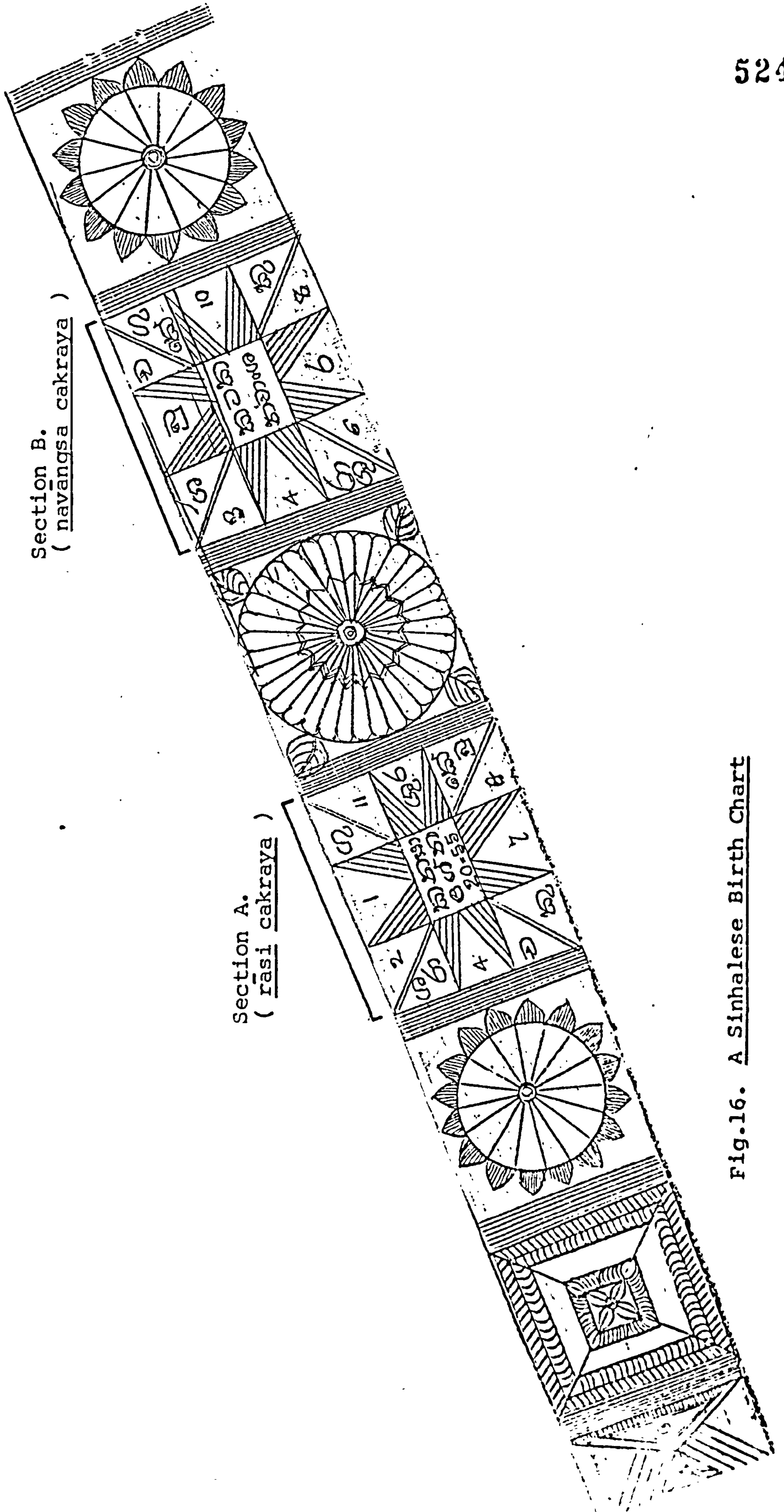


Fig.16. A Sinhalese Birth Chart

case it is Virgo (Kanyā). In the diagram, Virgo thus takes the first position with the other signs of the zodiac following on in sequence in an anti-clockwise direction, ending with Leo (Singha) in the twelfth house. The location of the nine planets at the time of birth can now be marked. In the horoscope above for example, the third house, Scorpio (Vr̥ścika) is occupied by both Saturn (Sani) and the Dragon's Head (Rāhu).

Once the rāsi cak-raya is completed the second part of the chart can be constructed, this is the portion marked B. This part of the horoscope gives a more exact indication of the portion of each zodiac sign occupied by the planets. In fact each of the twelve signs is divided into nine which give the chart its name, navānsa cakraya, or 'chart of the nine divisions'. The ecliptic is thus divided into 108 sub-divisions ( $12 \times 9 = 108$ ) with each of these divisions occupying  $3^{\circ} 20'$  of the total ecliptic. Commencing with Aries each of the nine divisions takes the name of a sign of the zodiac moving around in sequence until all the 108 divisions have been given a name. Thus the first navānsa of Aries is Aries, the second one Taurus, the third Gemini, etc. until all ninth divisions of Aries have been filled. The first navānsa of the second sign, Taurus thus becomes Capricorn, the second Aquarius, the third Pisces and so on through all the signs. The degrees of the sign of the zodiac which have passed at the time of birth indicate the



navāṁsa in which a person is born. This navāṁsa becomes the ascendant of the navāṁsa cakraya and is marked in the centre of the diagram. In this case it is Cancer (Katakā) and this then becomes the first house of the navāṁsa cakraya with the others following in sequence. The navāṁsa occupied by each planet can be known from the degrees which they have travelled through each sign at the moment of birth. This information can then be displayed in the chart. Thus, for example, section A of the horoscope indicates that the twelfth house, which is Leo (Singha) is occupied by Jupiter (Guru) but the second section indicates that Jupiter occupies the ninth division of Leo which corresponds to Taurus, that is the second ninth division of Leo.

The back of the horoscope contains further information which relates to the particularities of a person's birth. Apart from information such as place of birth and exact time of birth the horoscope gives the janma nākat or the lunar asterism occupied by the moon at the time of birth. This latter detail is of great significance in predicting what kind of attributes and qualities the child will have. It is used in choosing the correct syllables to begin the child's name, calculating planetary periods and selecting marriage partners, to name but three of the ways in which it is used.

The above represents the raw data with which an astrologer works. It is to this raw data that the

astrologers' knowledge is brought to bear. The significations of the planets and their movements through the ecliptic, their configurations and mutual positions are all taken into consideration as the astrologer attempts to discern order through the systematic interpretation of each unique horoscope.

As is readily apparent from the above, the key to personal astrology is the horoscope and, not surprisingly, they are very important to most Sinhalese people. Parents will rarely fail to have a horoscope constructed after the birth of a child and throughout life it remains a treasured possession, loss of which might have serious repercussions. For finding auspicious times, matching partners at marriage, fortune-telling and explaining misfortune, the horoscope is essential. Hodge (1981:231a) records that out of a sample of 411 householders 154 (37.5%) had visited an astrologer in the last three months and only 21 (5.1%) had never visited one at all.

One of the commonest uses of the horoscope is in fortune telling. Hodge (ibid:231b) records that out of a sample of 361, 99 (27.4%) visited an astrologer for general fortune telling with 128 (35.5%) visiting for cases of misfortune in particular. It is in this domain that Beravā astrologers are most active providing a range of cures and rituals to alleviate misfortune, the Bali Tovil being but one. Whatever action ensues however, all depend on the calculation of the periods of planetary

influence which an individual is going through.

The calculation of planetary periods is not found in western astrology but appears to be a technique peculiar to Indian astrology. There are many different methods of calculating such periods from a person's horoscope some of which are more popular than others. The method commonly used in Sri Lanka today, largely I suspect because of its ease of application, is the Vimsottāri Dasā Kramaya. A full elucidation of this technique is given in Rele (1935).

The method is based on a particular order of the planets as they were viewed in the heavens at a particular time (A.D. 649 according to Rele). Secondly, it is based upon the calculation of periods (mahā dasā) for each of the planets. These periods are based on the number of years it takes for a planet to move from the asterism (nākat) over which it has rulership to the same nākat or one of its trines, that is through  $120^\circ$ , whilst remaining in the same position above the Eastern horizon. The order of the planets and their periods of influence are given in the following table:

<u>Duration of mahā dasā</u>	
1. Moon	10 years
2. Mars	7 years
3. Dragon's Head	18 years
4. Jupiter	16 years



5. Saturn	19 years
6. Mercury	17 years
7. Dragon's Tail	7 years
8. Venus	20 years
9. Sun	6 years

The sum total of all these periods is 120 years and this is believed to be the maximum length of life that any individual can attain. Such longevity can only be attained if all the planets are in their exalted positions at the time of birth. Furthermore, the dasā method can be used to predict the length of life of an individual.

The relation of these periods to an individual horoscope is achieved by assigning each of the planets to particular asterisms (nākat). The ecliptic is divided into twenty-seven such asterisms, each of these occupying  $13^{\circ} 20'$  of the ecliptic. Each of the nākat has a planet as its ruler and as there are 27 nākat and nine planets each planet has rulership over three different nākat, the order of the planets being repeated once for every  $120^{\circ}$  of the ecliptic. The planetary periods commence in any one of three nākat as follows:

Kāti, Uturapala, Utrasala	Ravi mahā dasā
Siyāvasa, Ada, Sā	Rāhu
Deṭa, Aslisa, Rēvatī	Budha
Rehena, Hata, Suvana	Chandra

Punāvasa, Visa, Puvapuṭupa	Guru
Asvida, Mā, Mula	Kētu
Muvasirasa, Denāṭa, Sita	Kuja
Pusa, Anura, Utrapuṭupa	Sani
Berana, Puvapal, Puvasala	Sikuru

It is the location of the moon in a particular nākat at the time of birth which determines the mahā dasā in which a person finds him or herself. For example, a person whose janma nākat is Suvana will be in the great period of the moon (Chandra Mahā Dasā) at the time of birth.

The information up to this point simply states that an individual is in a certain period which in itself is of little significance. The next step is to establish the amount of time taken for the moon to traverse that portion of the nākat from the time the moon entered the nākat to the time of the birth of the individual. Thus if the total time taken for the moon to traverse a nākat is equated with the total period of rulership of a planet then by the use of simple proportions the amount of nākat which the moon has already traversed can be used to calculate the period of a planet which has already passed and is still pending.

Both the establishment of an individual's mahā dasāva at birth and the calculation of the portion of the period already passed are facilitated by the use of an

astrological almanac. The almanac most commonly in use in Sri Lanka is the 'Pancāṅga Lita' published by Gunasena and compiled annually by the staff of the 'Iranama' astrological newspaper. On page 19 of the 1980 almanac is given information about the nākat and their associated planets and mahā dasā. On pages 20 and 21 is given a chart which enables the amounts of periods already passed at the time of birth to be read off like logarithms. On page 22 of the almanac is given a further chart for making finer adjustments to these calculations.

Each of the nine mahā dasā are further sub-divided into nine periods called antar dasā. The ruler of the mahā dasāva is the same as the ruler of the first antar dasāva of that period, the subsequent periods being ruled by the planets in the order given below. The length of rulership of a planet in their antar dasāva is proportionately the same as it is in the mahā dasā. For example, the sub-periods of rulership in the great period of the sun (Ravi Mahā Dasā) is as follows:-

	Years	Months	Days
1. Ravi	0	3	18
2. Chandra	0	6	0
3. Kuja	0	4	6
4. Rāha	0	10	24
5. Guru	0	9	18
6. Sani	0	11	12



7. Budha	0	10	6
8. Kētū	0	4	6
9. Sikuru	1	0	0
	<hr/>		
	6	0	0

The antar dasā for all the planets are displayed in this fashion for all the planets on page 19 of the almanac. If the period of the mahā dasāva already passed is known then the sub-period in which an individual is born can be easily known by addition and subtraction. There are further calculations which deal with ever finer discriminations within planetary periods such as the aturu dasā, antar anata dasā, etc., but the calculations rarely go beyond the level of mahā dasā and antar dasā.

Once the periods through which a person is passing have been identified it is the skill of the astrologer to be able to relate these periods to his or her birth chart and the contemporary positions, configurations and relationships of the planets. The astrologer can then go on to make qualitative statements based on his objective interpretations of the patient's astrological lookout. In locating and interpreting the significance of certain periods for an individual the astrologer will indicate what the sources of misfortune are likely to be.

There are a number of named periods which, if located in a horoscope are unlikely to be dismissed without some alleviating action being taken. These are referred to,

according to context, as ērāṣṭaka, caturāṣṭaka, sūryāṣṭaka, candrāṣṭaka, and bhāḍaka: each one of these configurations augurs particularly badly and spells varying degrees of hindrance and impediment in the life of the victim. The most severe period that can be encountered is a māraka kālaya, literally 'death time', in which the forecast is so dire as to result in a fatality, as in the case of the mudalālī given in Chapter 5.

In a sense this is the starting point for the bali tovil for it is up to the organisers of the ritual to interpret such readings, made by themselves or others, in order that they can be translated into tangible phenomena which are likely to effect the person's life. The ritual is able to act upon these effects in the light of the dominant planetary influences and the duration and severity of their effects.

## APPENDIX IV

## THE IMAGES ASSEMBLED FOR A HAT BALI TOVIL

Image construction

Each of the images in clay is constructed upon a rectangular base made from planks, bamboo canes and string. The proportions of the frames are roughly 3 x 1, an auspicious proportion, also used in the construction of yantra to bring about positive effects. The clay used to construct the images is a fine pipe clay (makulu) made from the earth of a termite hill. The clay is soaked in water and to it is added milk and sandalwood (sandun kiri). The mixture is laboriously puddled until a workable consistency is achieved. It is then applied to the frames and shaped approximately using stones to augment the volume where necessary. As the image develops proportions are checked using a makeshift yardstick. Once the shape is roughly mapped out, the surface is smoothed



with wet hands to produce an image which incorporates 2D and 3D elements. Significant parts of the images, such as their heads, chests and shoulders, are brought out into the third dimension, whilst the background and bodies remain flat. The use of line and colour further blurs the distinction between flatness and relief giving the images a dominating yet ambiguous quality.

Once the shape of the images is completed, they are painted white with ground kaolin. Upon this undercoat, red, yellow, blue and grey are applied using home-made brushes of pig-hair and horse-hair. These brushes are highly effective in the production of sweeping, bold lines on the already suggestive curved surfaces of the images. The colour is applied opaquely with attempts in places to create further volume by the use of lights and darks. The images from right to left are as follows (see Plates VII, VIII, and IX):-

1. Dasā Bandī: This image is a representation of the deity believed to preside over the great period of the Sun (irugē mahā dasāva) and his veneration in the ritual is intended to relieve all the misfortunes arising within that period.

The image portrays an odd character with a seemingly disjointed neck, without significance (tērumak nā), I was assured. The image is about three feet high and the deity has a yellow body, four arms and a single head. In

his hands he carries a conch shell (hak gediya), a water-pot (kendiya), and an arrow (iya). His vehicle is a lotus flower (piyum vāhana).

2. Viskam Baliya: Possibly the most important image to be dedicated during the ceremony, the Viskam Baliya is a representation of Visva Karman, the Divine Artificer, 'patron saint' of crafts and craftsmen. Its inclusion in the ritual is intended to remove any dos which Piyasena might have accrued as a result of his profession as a carpenter. By far the greatest attention was paid to this image in its construction and dedication.

The image of Visva Karman stands almost six-feet high and portrays an impressive ten-armed, five-headed deity with a yellow body. The central face is carefully sculpted, whilst the other four are flat. His neck, arms and chest are adorned with ornaments and upon his feet he wears a pair of anklets (halamba). Around his neck hangs a serpent (uranga malāvaka), a common feature in the representation of lesser gods and demons. Around his legs curls a bull, the vehicle of Visva Karman.

In his hands he holds a variety of objects associated with crafts and craftsmen. In his right hands he holds a book (potaka), a pair of compasses (kavakatuva), a scribe (pathinda), a sword (kaduva) and the fifth hand is left free, held in an upright position signifying the god's benevolence. In his left hand he holds a

pomegranate (dālum palayak), an auspicious clay pot (pun kalasa), a spouted water pot (kendiya), a trident (trisulak) and a soot-coated thread (dāli nūlak) of the type used by craftsmen in marking out long straight lines (cf. Coomaraswamy 1908:79).

3. Sūriyavamsa Baliya: This image depicts a member of the solar race of kings (Sūriyavamsa), an incarnation of the Sun (ravigē avatāra). He is believed to provide relief from seven kinds of disorders arising from imbalances in the wind (vāta) and bile (pita) humours. His propitiation is also believed to cancel out diseases caused by the malign attentions of demons and spirits (yakku and bhūtayō).

The image stands four and a half feet high and is of a pink-bodied deity wearing a yellow cloth and blue sash. He has three heads, each adorned with crowns and earrings. In each of his hands he holds a weapon: in his left a rosary (lakavāla) and in his right a pigeon-like bird (lihiniya pakṣaya). At his feet is a peacock vehicle (monara vāhana). His general appearance is suggestive of the status of a king or Prince.

4. The Asu-ek Gāba Mal Baliya: The centre piece of the offerings is the magnificent floral offering receptacle composed of 81 pigeon holes. Nine times nine cavities (gāba) into which the patient's offerings will be placed



during the ritual and onto which he will gaze for most of the night. The structure is intended to absorb evil and misfortune (dos) from the patient and his surrounds.

The mal baliya is constructed from strips of banana stem and decorated with strips of young coconut (gok-kola) and flowers.

Each of the 81 squares has its own precise cosmic referent, each of which is elaborated to a greater or lesser degree in the course of the mal baliya's dedication (cf. Figure 17). The significance of each of the 81 squares is summarised in a poem at the beginning of the mal baliya sequence:

hīn rakṣu hatara da  
 aṭa visi nākat devindu da  
 sanī saka da trī mohōta da  
 aṣṭa rakusan dēvatāva da  
 dolos nam devindu da  
 senādīpati yakuna da  
 tiṭhi pahalos devindu da  
 obaṭa nava graha devayan samagada  
 ek-asuvak pamana devatāvan dāna gena.

The rākṣa of the four hīn  
 the gods of the twenty-eight nākat  
sanī saka and the trinity  
 the eight rākṣa godlings  
 the twelve named gods [i.e. gods of the zodiac]  
 the chief of all the demons  
 the gods of the fifteen tiṭhi  
 to you also the gods of the nine planets  
 come to know these eighty one godlings.

I. Hīn haterayi: the four hīn. These are the four constellations (nākat) which include the one under which a person was born, along with the 7th, 14th and 21st therefrom. The hīn are located at the four corners of

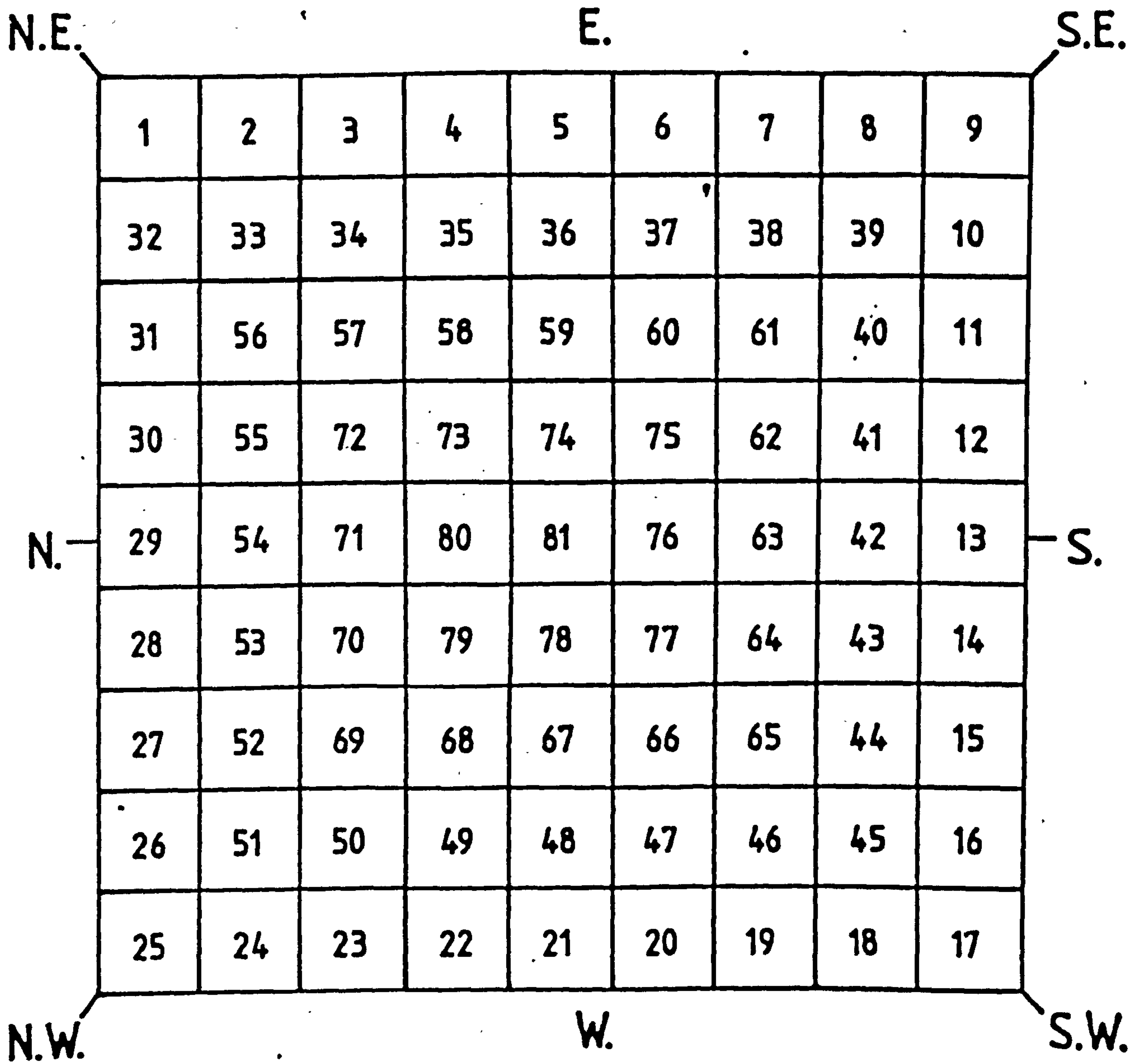


Figure 17. The Asu-Ek Gāba Mal Baliya. (otherwise known as the Sarvaḥ bhadraya cakraya, a mystical diagram of 81 squares.)

the structure and are named as follows: 1) murtu, 9) yama, 17) kāla, and 25) vāyu. The four hīn are classed as rākṣa and are portrayed as such in the Chandra Baliya.

II. Nākat visi atayī: the twenty eight constellations. There are in fact only twenty seven constellations but to these is added a twenty eighth intercalary constellation called the Abijit Nākat. The nākat are located around the outer perimeter in sequence, interspersed by the hīn at the four corners. The nākat are as follows: 2) Rēvatī, 3) Asvidā, 4) Berana, 5) Kātī, 6) Rehena, 7) Muvasirasa, 8) Ada, 10) Punāvasa, 11) Pusa, 12) Aslisa, 13) Mā, 14) Puvapal, 15) Utrapal, 16) Hata, 18) Sita, 19) Sā, 20) Visā, 21) Anura, 22) Deṭa, 23) Mula, 24) Puvasala, 26) Utrasala, 27) Abijit, 28) Suvana, 29) Denāṭa, 30) Siyavasa, 31) Puvaputupa, and 32) Utraputupa.

Appeal is made to the rulers or regents of the twenty-eight constellations in the course of the ritual.

III. Tri Muhurta or Mohōta: the trinity. The significance of these three deities is far from clear in the context of this ritual. They are said to be equivalent to the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva, but take a somewhat obscure form, as is seen from the names given them which are as follows: 33) Gāba, 34)



Dvāra and 35) Bāhira meaning literally womb, door or threshold and finally outside or external.

IV. Aṣṭa Rākṣa: the eight rākṣa. The beings covered by the category rākṣa are numerous and varied. For some people they are ogres and cannibals believed to be descendants of the indigenous population of the island, whilst in other contexts they are taken to be Titan-like beings with the power to challenge even the gods. Thirdly, they are taken to be morally neutral (or at least ambivalent) nature deities and it is into this category that the Aṣṭa Rākṣa appear to fall, given their names: 36) Jala Rākṣa (water); 37) Agni Rākṣa (fire); 38) Sravana Rākṣa (noise/music); 39) Nāga Rākṣa (snake/serpent); 40) Mēgha Rākṣa (clouds/thunder); 41) Vāyu Rākṣa (wind); 42) Māṃsa Rākṣa (flesh?); 43) Sarva Rākṣa (totality/universality?).

The exact cosmological status of these beings is far from clear.

V. Dolos Rāsi: the twelve signs of the zodiac. These signs are equivalent to our own and in fact were assimilated into Indian astrology from the Greek and grafted onto the more ancient system based on lunar asterisms (nakṣāstra or nākata). The signs referred to are as follows: 44) Meṣa (Aries); 45) Vṛṣabha (Taurus); 46) Mithuna (Gemini); 47) Kṛtaka

(Cancer); 48) Singha (Leo); 49) Kanyā (Virgo); 50) Tulā (Libra); 51) Vṛścika (Scorpio); 52) Dhanu (Saggitarius); 53) Makara (Capricorn); 54) Kumbha (Aquarius); and 55) Mīna (Pisces).

VI. Sani Sakaya: the wheel of Saturn. This provides another somewhat puzzling inclusion and I could find no explanation for his presence other than he is associated with Saturn. In the diagram he occupies the fifty-sixth square.

VII. Tithi Pahalovayi: the fifteen tithi. These represent the fifteen days of the lunar fortnight (the month consisting of fifteen days of the waxing moon and fifteen days of the waning moon). The fifteen tithi take up almost the entire of the third perimeter as follows: 60) Pālaviya; 61) Diyavaka; 62) Tiyavaka; 63) Jalavaka; 64) Visētiya; 65) Sṣṭavaka; 66) Satavaka; 67) Aṭavaka; 68) Navavaka; 69) Dasavaka; 70) Ekolosvaka; 71) Dolosvaka; 72) Telesvaka; 57) Tudusvaka; 58) Pasaloslavaka.

VIII. Vesamuni Rāja: the demon king (lit. 'masked face'). The fifty ninth square is of special importance as it is given over to the leader of all demons (Senādipati yakka). He is the guardian of the north and is identified with Vaisravana one of the gods of the four

corners, who is further identified with Kuvera the lord of wealth who guards the riches stored inside the earth. It is in his role as chief of all demons that he is represented in this ritual.

IX. Nava Grahayō: the nine planets. These are by far the most important deities to be propitiated by the mal baliya and as such they occupy the central nine squares in the following order: 74) Iru (the Sun); 75) Sukra (Venus); 76) Kuja (Mars); 77) Rāhu (Dragon's Head); 78) Senasuru (Saturn); 79) Candra (the Moon); 80) Buda (Mercury); 73) Guru (Jupiter); and finally 81) Kātu (Dragon's Tail).

In view of the importance of the nine planets I would like to give a brief explication of their characteristics as they are given in the ritual. This will further give an idea of the way in which the numerous deities which make up the 81 gods of the mal baliya are given individual identities using a relatively small vocabulary of characteristics.

74) Iru or Ravi (the Sun)

direction: East (indra diga)

offering: saffron rice (kokun van bat)

tree: imbul gaha

weapon: two headed hand drum (udḥkkiya)



vehicle: peacock (monera vāhana)

colour: golden

75) Sukra or Sikuru (Venus)

direction: South-east (ginikona)

offering: rice mixed with ghee (vendaru bat)

tree: karanda gaha

weapon: fly-whisk (cāmarā)

vehicle: bull

colour: white

76) Kuja or Angharu (Mars)

direction: South (yāma diga)

offering: red rice (ratu bat)

tree: kolon gaha

weapon: elephant goad (ankusaya)

vehicle: peacock (monera vāhana)

colour: red

77) Rāhu or Pani (Dragon's Head)

direction: South-west (nirita)

offering: milk rice with gingelly (tala kiri bat)

tree: vāteke gaha

weapon: fish held in the right hand

vehicle: horse (asvaya)

colour: white

## 78) Senasuru or Sani (Saturn)

direction: West (varuna)offering: blue rice (nil van bat)tree: nuga gahaweapon: a fan (avanpataya)vehicle: a crow (kaputa)

colour: blue

## 79) Candra or Sandu (the Moon)

direction: North-west (vayamba)offering: white rice (sudu van bat)tree: divul gahaweapon: belt/rope (pattiya)vehicle: elephant (āta)

colour: white

## 80) Buda or Budahu (Mercury)

direction: North (sauma)offering: golden rice (ran van bat)tree: kosamba gahaweapon: conch shell (hak gediya)

vehicle: a buffalo

colour: white

## 73) Guru or Brahaspati (Jupiter)

direction: North-east (isāna)offering: golden rice (ran van bat)

tree: bo gaha

weapon: golden pot (ran kalasa)

vehicle: a human being

colour: golden

81) Ketu (Dragon's Tail)

direction: centre/abyss (pātale)

offering: yellow rice (pandu van bat)

tree: banana tree (ramba gaha)

weapons: a rosary and a book (lakavāla and pota)

vehicle: swan (hansa)

colour: yellow (or in some instances grey)

The graphical equivalents of the characteristics of the planets can be seen in Plate V, page 261.

5) Chandra Baliya: This image is dedicated to the moon (Chandra) and is intended to relieve disorders which arise as a result of the moon traversing inauspicious constellations.

The image is four and a half feet high and displays at its centre a domed circle representing the moon. At each of the four corners are painted rākṣa, each of distinct colour and appearance. The four rākṣa represent the four corners (hīn), which, in astrological terms, are reckoned as the overlords of nākat in which a person is born, along with the 7th, 14th and 21st nākat



from that point. The moon's movement through these positions has particular repercussions for the patient.

At the centre of the moon is painted a picture of a hare (hāva), an animal commonly associated with the moon in both Buddhist and Hindu mythology.

6) Dasā Krōḍa Rākṣa Baliya: This demon is associated with Saturn and his appeasement in the ceremony is intended to cancel out his wrath (krōḍa) during the fateful period.

The image stands over six feet high and portrays a ferocious rākṣa of beastly visage and gross physique. The face displays the characteristic bulging and inflamed eyes, hooked nose and tusks protruding from a gaping mouth. He has twenty arms in each of which he brandishes swords, spears, goads and the like. In one of his hands he holds a cockerel (kukula), a creature strongly associated with exorcism throughout Sinhalese mythology (cf. Barnett 1917:24). Hideous faces peep out from the joints of his body. He rides a lotus flower vehicle.

7) Ē Rāstaka Baliya: This image depicts a deity associated with the unfavourable location of Saturn (Senasuru) in the zodiac. It is also associated with the excessive generation of heat in the body from which it gets its alternative name of Uṣṇadhārya, the 'bearer of heat'. 'Heat' in the body is a common cause of illness in

traditional Sinhalese medicine.

The image is about three feet tall and portrays a yellow-bodied deity with four arms. His body is adorned with various items of jewellery and he wears a brightly coloured cloth and bodice. At his feet lies a wheel which symbolises his vehicle, the chariot (rathaya). Clusters of serpents coil around his head and eyes peer out from the concentric bands which make up his turban.

Once the images are firmly secured in place, a large number of weapons (āyudha) are fitted into the soft banana trunk borders. These include elephant goads (ankusa or kudapat) and tridents (trisula) which, far from being prosaic, are intended to protect the enclosed sacred space from the unwelcome attention of certain demons.

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